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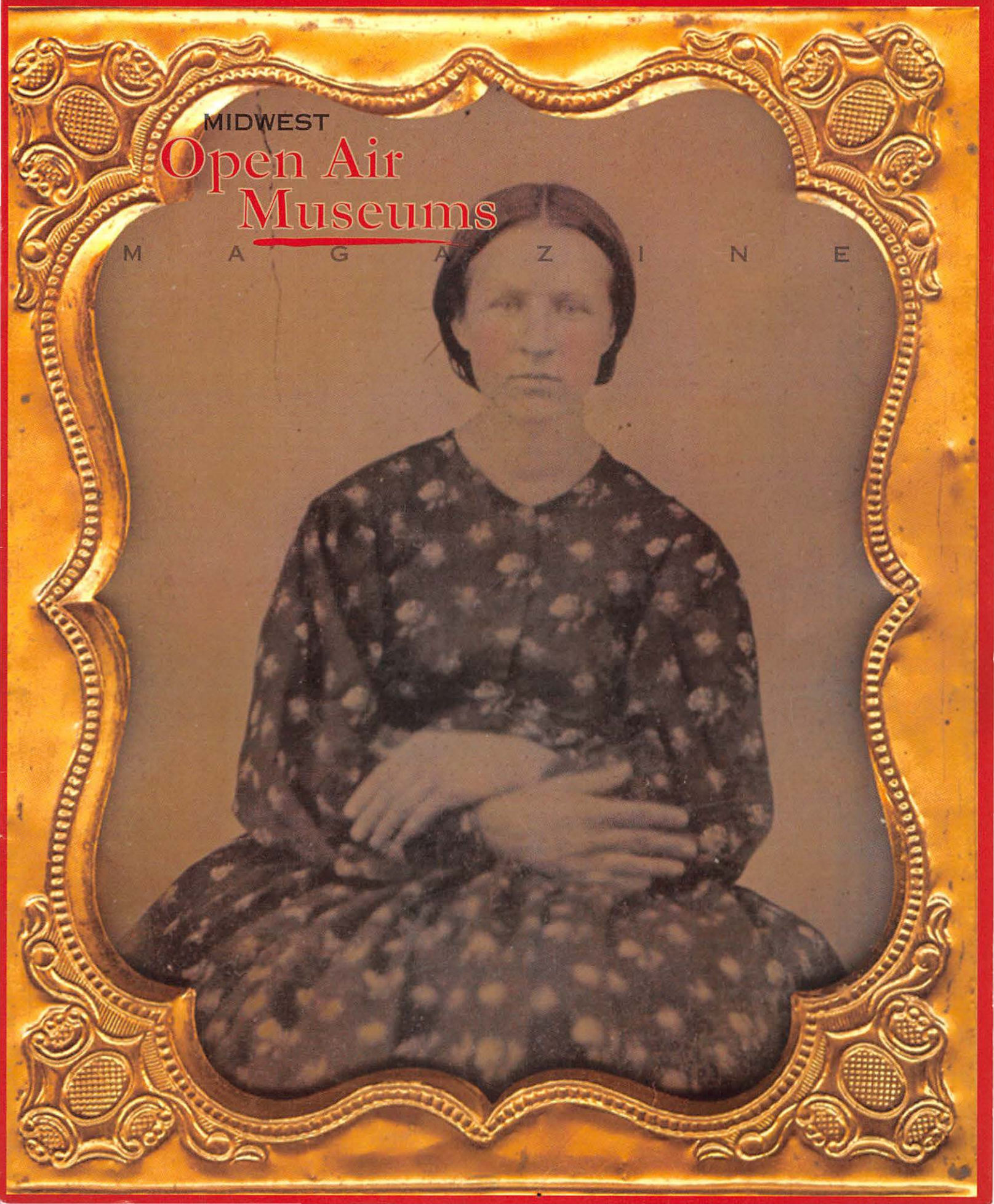
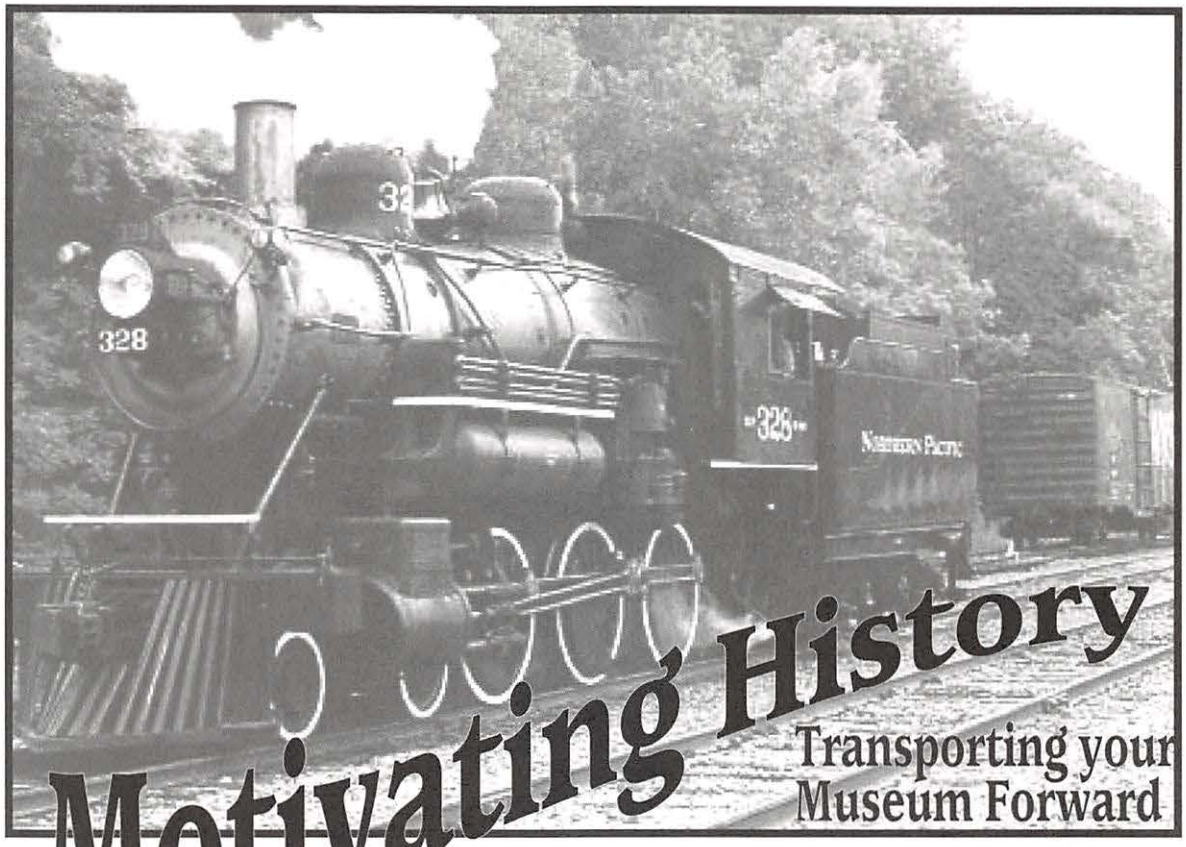
Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine





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About the Cover

Posed against an absolutely plain background, she wears a simple cotton calico dress characteristic of the early- to mid-sixties. Her dress fabric has a dark ground with a lighter floral pattern. The sleeves are of the bishop style, easy to roll up for work. The waist treatment is obscured by her large, rough-looking hands, but the bodice looks to be darted and the skirt presumably gathered evenly around the waist. The buttons up the front pull at her low bustline, which seems to indicate the absence of a properly fitted corset.

It is interesting to note that, in addition, she wears no collar or cuffs—such a simple and inexpensive way to "dress up" an outfit. She wears no jewelry, and her hair is arranged very simply, but neatly, at the nape of her neck.

President's Perspective

Homogenized popular culture stinks.

This hit home for me recently following a discussion with a colleague about the future of museums (and indeed the future of organizations like MOMCC). My colleague asserted that, within the next twenty years, all history museums will have to face the choice of whether to "stick to their guns" in terms of the museum's traditional function, or to face up to the increasing public cries of, "Here we are, now entertain us." This colleague asserted that either museums will need to embrace popular culture and think outside of their traditional roles, or they will perish.

I have to disagree.

In my last "President's Perspective," I wrote about re-aligning museums with their original mission to provide public services, to act as a transforming influence on society. Museums in general (and history museums in particular) have to meet their communities' needs, and for us, one of those deals with understanding our communities' identities. Who comprises our communities? Where did the populations come from? What is unique about each community? Probably even more importantly, what is that underlying story among each community that points out the universality of the human experience in the midst of diversity?

Popular culture – which some apparently seem to embrace as the museum field's salvation – does not value social service. Pop culture emphasizes the here and now, the quick and easy, the glamorous (image-based), the non-linear. It values the individual over the relational, passive entertainment over critical thought and creativity, consumerism over production. It prizes experience over (and often in place of) knowledge, the emotional/sensory over the substantive. Pop culture does not *inherently* dehumanize people, but it does carry a great potential to do so, by de-accentuating those elements of all cultures across time that make us human – intelligence, thoughtfulness, spirituality, productivity, creativity, relational capacity.

I suppose it just strikes me as ironic that popular culture's influence on museums –ostensibly one of the most transformative social institutions – has been greater than the museum's influence on culture. Instead of museums serving as the community's storyteller, teacher, and identity sculptor, we wind up grasping for images, characters, and experiences our potential audiences already know through popular media, as a desperate attempt to find a common language that will draw folks into conversation with us.

Part of our problem as a field, in my estimation, is that we fall for the biggest trap pop culture can set for us. Pop culture is driven by marketing, technology, and the one component necessary to both, money. We have stepped on the trigger, believing that quantity (big numbers through the gates, huge sponsorships/donations) equates to successful completion of our mission.

I certainly don't mean to imply that marketing, technology, and money are not essential. They absolutely are, but they are tools and need to be used strategically to a properly prioritized end. Similarly, I don't claim that popular culture is evil. I'm just as inclined as the next person to quote a song, a movie, or a TV show. But we need to be careful that it doesn't shape our museums in an adverse way.

Someone once said that crisis (and I do believe that museums are in a crisis) can serve as an opportunity. Popular culture can be an entrance point for conversation, but museums are meant to be transformative, not derivative. Like anything else, pop culture is a tool and should not be confused for the end product.

Recent communication on the MOMCC message board made me think about another opportunity that our museums might consider – and it kind of ties all of these thoughts together. With the constant screech of techno-driven, fast-paced popular culture (cell phones, loud radios, blaring advertisements, soccer mom-hood, etc.), why don't we *strategically* use pop culture to market (yes, I said it) ourselves as an alternative to all that insanity. Many of our sites are unique in that we are often among the few remaining green spaces in rapidly expanding suburban areas. Can't you see the advertisements? Flashing images, loud noises, obnoxious announcers at a feverish pitch, reaching a crescendo, then suddenly QUIET. Maybe a shot of cow at pasture, maybe somebody pumping water. I don't know what would fit for your site, but it seems like museums might capitalize on our unique settings and give folks the chance to disconnect every now and again, instead of always pressing onward and upward. But maybe that's Pollyanna-ish on my part.

I've run out of space to argue with my colleague's other assertion that all museums, regardless of size, nature or individual mission, will need to conform to the pop culture model or die (also known as the "Resistance is futile—you will be assimilated" theory). In place of an argument, I will just say that museums are diverse in terms of their locations, audiences, and individualized missions, but are unified in their cause to serve their respective communities, and to respect people's intelligence, relational capacity, spirituality and creativity.

"People say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one."

-- Rob

THE EDITORIUM

Recently, I found myself hauling bedsteads up and down a flight of stairs at ten o'clock at night. Earlier that day, in a fit of insanity—I mean, inspiration—my boss, Tim Talbott, and I had decided to completely refurnish one of the bedrooms in the historic house. An 1870s bedroom suite complete with marble-topped washstand sat in the 1865 children's room, taunting us with its inappropriateness, it being merely the largest (and heaviest) offender in a room with so much potential. So, armed with only our bare hands and our combined knowledge of mid-nineteenth century material culture, we conquered that beast and reclaimed the room in the name of historical accuracy. We toiled for hours, putting furniture in storage and replacing it with more accurate furnishings. We searched the walls for evidence of a stovepipe hole. We pondered what accessories should adorn the room and make it look lived in. It still has a ways to go, but we were quite proud of the changes we were able to make. (And yes, I know we really should have written a furnishing plan first! All in good time...)

The thing is, we are both so passionate about our work and telling the story the house has to tell, we easily get caught up in it. It causes us to sometimes lose our faculty of reason and our sense of time. We become obsessed with improving the site and better informing our guests. And I know that he and I are not alone in this consuming quest. In fact, if you're reading this magazine, you are probably afflicted. Who among you hasn't stayed up until all hours of the night reading nonfiction history books "for fun"? Who hasn't spent way too much money on reproduction fabric, resulting in a month of ramen noodle dinners? Who hasn't "volunteered" time at work when you know that:

a) you really should be getting paid for it, and

b) you really should be home taking care of your children/dog/cat/goldfish?

In fact, most of us are so passionate about our work that we do it for peanuts (or salt pork, as the case may be). This is one of the few professions I can think of where many people have master's degrees and still make less than a fast-food worker. Somehow, though, it's all worth it, as long as we can get our message out to the public.

But sometimes our passion can hinder us. Of course, we can burn out completely and leave the profession to become accountants. Or we can just get so focused on our research and accuracy that we forget that most people *just don't care* that we're wearing the correct drawers underneath our period clothing. We often seem to forget that most of the public comes in knowing little, if anything about the intricacies of what we do. That's not to say that we should forget about accuracy, not by any means. I suppose I'm just saying that we cannot expect our guests to get as excited as we do about things like hand-sewn buttonholes. It only sets us up for disappointment and alienates our guests. That's why it's so important to find out what our visitors are interested in and to understand where they are coming from so that we can make history matter to them in their 21st-century lives. Otherwise, we're just doing this for our own self-satisfaction... and I sure ain't moving bedsteads for that.

--Laura

Putting the Visitor First: A Journey From the Practical to the Profound

BY
Barbara Ceiga

[Editor's Note: This piece was originally given as the keynote address for the Spring 2007 MOMCC conference in Glenview, Illinois.]

When I was told that the theme for the spring MOMCC conference was "Getting Back to Basics," I was thrilled. I'm a basic kind of person—perhaps it's my destiny. I'm not one to place any stock in astrology, but I'm a Capricorn—a sign that is usually described as follows: "You are steady, level-headed, hard-working, and dependable. Your favorite color is brown."

As I started preparing this talk, it began to take on a life of its own. Thoughts of PowerPoints and embedded MPG clips crept into the picture. And then I said to myself, "Hold on—the title of this meeting is 'Back to Basics.' So what exactly IS the basic idea of putting the visitor first?"

This led to a series of other questions:

- Why do visitors matter in the first place?
- Who are these people we call our visitors?
- How do we put them first?

In looking at these questions I realized there were multiple ways of answering them that basically fell into two categories—the practical and the profound.

Just about every kind of work is made up of a combination of the practical and profound. When you first embark on an endeavor, be it cooking or truck driving or teaching or farming, you usually begin with a heavy dose of the practical. You learn the mechanics, skills, and techniques of what you're doing—cracking an egg, parallel parking, milking a cow. But then, over time, with a lot of practice and experience, you master the practical part of what you're doing, and then, if you're lucky, you enter another realm of work. It is a realm where you don't have to think about all the details and particulars of what you're doing, and your mind moves to a place where you focus on the "big picture" of what you're doing. This is the world of the profound.

Take cooking, for example. You go from being a cook, who carefully dices and chops and follows recipes, to a master chef, who knows the different qualities and flavors of his ingredients, knows the proper way of preparing and combining them, and knows how they will look and taste when he or she is done.

All of us are scattered as points along this continuum from the novice to the expert, the practical to the profound. Some of us might never completely cross over from one to the other. I've been working in museums for over twenty years and I feel like I've just begun to make the transition. But then again, I'm a slow, steady Capricorn, so perhaps that's to be expected.

Still, I think I have enough perspective to serve as a tour guide of sorts for this journey from the practical to the profound. I'll try to point out interesting features, some of which you will recognize instantly, others which some of you have not yet encountered but, perhaps once they've been pointed out, you'll be familiar with them when you come upon them in your own journey.

We begin our journey with the basic question, "Why should we even care about these people called 'visitors'?" Why do we want them to come to our places? Engage in our activities? Take up our valuable time that could be better spent getting caught up with our filing?

The practical answer is that, without visitors, we'd be out of business. Visitors are the reason we exist, whether we like them or not. We are public institutions and, as such, have to let them in and provide them with our products and services. Another way to think about them is that they're our "customers," and the purpose of our work is to earn their custom.

If you want to be purely mercenary about it, these visitors pay our salaries—either directly through admissions and program fees, or indirectly through tax support—and in return we toil to produce things, products and experiences, for them. If we do it right, they show up, engage, and enjoy themselves. If we do it wrong, they don't and that's the end of that.

Another way to look at this topic from a purely practical point of view is to imagine what would happen if our visitors stopped showing up. For some of you this might seem like a dream—"finally I'll be able to get some work done." But then reality sets in: direct revenue dries up, then donors stop writing checks, then the township or city or county catches wind that folks aren't coming, and your government support shrinks, and finally all those organizations that provide outcome-based grants want nothing to do with you.

How long would your organization last without visitors?

Now on to the profound answer to the question of why we should care about our visitors. We should care simply because we believe—really believe—that letting them visit us, spend time at our place, see our stuff, take our programs—these things will make their lives better in some way. It will turn an ordinary day into an extraordinary day, a day to remember and look back on fondly.

Now some of you might think that I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. I'm not saying that every person who comes through our doors will have a life-changing experience. Far from it. But we can try to make sure that every person who comes through our doors should feel welcome and comfortable and competent and cared for. That alone is something to shoot for.

Once we've accomplished this, we can expect that a certain proportion of our visitors will find something that delights them, amuses them, gives them something they can brag about to their friends, or inspires them to read a book or watch a television program or engage in a conversation with someone about.

And then, if we're incredibly lucky and we've done enough things right for it to happen, there will be a few, only a very few, who while they're visiting us, have some experience that changes their lives forever. When they walk in through our doors, their lives are on a certain course, and when they leave, it's shifted to a new direction that it will take them to an exciting new destination.

I know this can happen because it's a documented phenomenon. Watch any of the talk shows, like Charlie Rose or Inside the Actors' Studio, and you'll hear over and over again about seminal moments from childhood—a trip to a museum or the theater or the ballet—that inspired a great career.

I myself have my own memorable life-changing experience. When I was about five or six years old, my family went to The Field Museum. At that time, very little was touchable, and my mother was ever-vigilant that we keep our hands to ourselves. But in the dinosaur hall there was a giant bone from the leg of a dinosaur, stretched out at kids' eye-level and no glass vitrine covering it. My mother preemptively warned, "Don't touch," but my father read the label, which called the bone the "feel bone." It went on to say that this was a real dinosaur bone and—miracle of miracles—I could touch it. Hardly able to comprehend the opportunity before me, I waited for approval from Mum. "Go ahead," she said, "touch it." And then, I went for it. I leaned forward, and kissed the dinosaur bone.

I myself have only a vague memory of this event. It was told over and over again so many times, it became a family legend of sorts. But about thirty years after that innocent and intimate encounter, I was back at The Field Museum, making an exhibit about the world's largest and most complete T. rex. And I can't help but think the two events are somehow related.

Another great memory I have from The Field Museum happened one day when I was tired and frustrated—about what I can't remember. All I remember was that it was a weekday afternoon, and I went for a walk through the dinosaur hall to clear my head. By the fossil prep lab there was a little crowd of people—curators, collections managers, and fossil preparators, and an elderly man in a wheelchair. They had brought out for him a selection of fossils they were working on, as if for his approval. A representative from our development department was also there, so I thought he must be one of our big-ticket donors. I asked the development person who he was and he told me that the man wasn't a donor, but was the recipient of an adult-version of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. His wish was to come to see the dinosaurs at The Field Museum, just as he had done as a little boy.

Now, whenever I get frustrated about something at work, I think of that moment, and it passes pretty quickly.

Well, I hope that pretty much covers why we should care about the visitor. It's now time to move on to our next stop: finding out just who these people we call our visitors are.

There's a whole industry that's grown up around this question. It's called market research. And while it can provide you with some pretty interesting facts and figures, it very much resides at the practical end of the practical to profound continuum. Market research can be a valuable thing. How many of you collect ZIP code information? How many of you have looked at this information within the past six months? It usually comes up when we're looking for money—trying to write a grant or push a referendum or do something else that justifies our need for more money.

A ZIP code survey reveals just one piece of information—where someone lives. You can leave it there, which doesn't really do much for you. Or you can use it as a tiny hole that if you tease it enough will unravel the mysteries of who these people are that come and spend time with us.

At the very least, you can cross-reference ZIP codes to their home communities. Visit their village or chamber-of-commerce websites. They usually list the vital statistics of their communities—household income, racial makeup, education levels, etc. Or you can get these from the US Census websites. So now you've got a long-lens view of who your visitors are. It's still a bit fuzzy, but it's better than a list of five-digit numbers.

Gathering demographics is a practical approach to answering the question "Who are our visitors?" For many of us, this is as far as we go, primarily out of practicality—market research tends to get more expensive as you move from the merely demographic to the psychographic. But there are other ways of delving deeper into this topic, and they don't require large investments of cash.

The key to making the leap from the practical to the profound is one that we're familiar with from our personal relationships. When you first meet someone, you spend a lot of time finding out who they are: where do they live, what do they do for a living, if they have kids or pets or hobbies. If you stick with it and find you have something in common, a relationship starts to form, and at some point they go from being someone you know to someone you call your friend. You know enough about them, about their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, quirks and foibles. And you respect them, and then you like them, and then you care about their happiness, and then you care enough to do things to bring happiness to them.

Now if we substitute the word "visitor" for "friend," we find ourselves in a realm of marketing that is decidedly profound. We develop a relationship with our visitors based on genuinely caring about who they are and what brings them happiness. Now, of course, I'm not saying that we should do whatever it takes to make our visitors happy. If that were the case, we'd all become museums that offer free ice cream and pony rides. What I'm saying is that once you know and care about your visitors as much as you know and care about your mission, you are perfectly poised for success.

The textbook example of a place that does this better than anyone is, of course, Disney. Whatever we feel about the ethics of what they do, we can all see that they do it exceptionally well. When you're at a Disney facility, you feel cared for and reassured and, although it's somewhat of an illusion, you feel entirely in control. You're getting to do exactly what you wanted—and more! And you get the feeling that all of this—the rides, the characters, the beautifully landscaped grounds, the fireworks—is being done because Disney cares about you and wants you to be happy.

Now, back to the reality of our world—that of the modest not-for-profit. And before you sink into self-pity about how little money we have, ask yourself the question, how much does it cost to care about our visitors? About making them comfortable, about delighting them, about making them smile? Here's a little exercise. Think about a favorite gift that you received recently, one that made you smile. Was it something expensive or over-the-top? A Lexus with a big red bow on it? Or was it a little trinket, with a note that said, "Saw this and thought of you"?

Once we get to know who our visitors are—and start to care about them—we can do a much better job of picking out things, of making things, like exhibits and activities, that bring happiness to them. And we can transform them from our visitors to our friends, and supporters, and advocates.

And now on to the third and final stop on our tour. How do we go about putting the visitor first?

We've touched on this a bit already. In short, get to know them, either formally, through surveys and questionnaires, or informally, by chatting with them and spending time with them.

There's a practical reason for doing this. Many granting bodies are basing their support on what's called "outcome-based evaluation." What this means is that when you submit your request for funds, you must have established that your visitors actually will benefit from what you're

planning on giving to them. Which means that you must have conducted a baseline survey of some sort. If you want to develop a program that dispels the myth that wolves eat little girls wearing red-hooded coats, you must first show that your visitors actually believe this. This sounds like an exaggeration, but it pretty much paraphrases the educational goal of a two-million-dollar exhibit project that I was invited to participate in about ten years ago. Imagine the client's shock when I presented them with survey results that showed nobody actually believed wolves ate little girls, regardless of the color of their coats.

A good rule of thumb to follow when you begin brainstorming a topic for a new program or exhibit or festival or anything else, is to ask yourself these questions:

1. What do visitors think is the most interesting aspect of this topic? Is it the same thing that we think it is?
2. Who finds this topic appealing? Is the group we're targeting realistically capable of or willing to respond to the topic?
3. What do they already know about this topic, if anything?
4. What do they care about this topic, if anything?
5. What will they expect to do or experience while learning about this topic? Is that something we can deliver?

The better you get to know your visitors, the better you'll get at answering these questions without having to conduct extensive or formal surveys. For example, I was recently asked to develop an exhibit about the science that goes on behind the scenes at a natural history museum. I know that a large proportion of visitors, especially novice museum-goers, have no idea that anything at all goes on behind the scenes at a museum, let alone important scientific research. So, instead of launching into an in-depth and fascinating look at the high-tech labs and the lab-coated individuals who work there, I know I have to start out a couple of steps back, beginning with what they do know—the stuff they see in the exhibits—and then introducing them to the idea that that's just the tip of the iceberg, and then finally presenting the scientific work that goes on behind the scenes. It's two extra steps, but they're important to the visitors' understanding of the topic.

Some curators and other experts refer to this as "pandering." It's not. It's being thoughtful and respectful of the visitors' knowledge and interest. The analogy I use is that of a ladder. The curators establish what the top rung of the ladder is, but it's up to me, as the exhibit developer, to determine what the bottom rung is and how many rungs I need to use to let the visitor scramble—not struggle—right up the ladder. If we set the rungs too low or close together, the visitor gets bored. If we set them too high or too far apart, the visitor gets frustrated. In both cases, they leave unhappier than when they arrived and they probably won't give us a second try at making them happy. Why should they? If we didn't care enough about them to make a good exhibit, why should they come back?

Before we end our journey of discovering who our visitors are, I'd like to suggest a few tips, techniques, and gimmicks that might help you begin your own journey. Two are purely practical things that are designed to jump-start the process. And the last one is more profound.

1. Be a visitor. Go someplace or do something that you don't normally do, something out of your comfort zone. It might be a theater performance or a military museum or a stroll through an unfamiliar town. It's usually in unfamiliar surroundings that we realize what makes us comfortable or uncomfortable. This is how your visitors feel when they come to visit you for the first time.

2. Be a visitor in your own place. This is especially helpful if you've already done the first exercise. It's very easy to criticize other institutions, but much harder to do it with ourselves. Attend your own programs, walk your own site, interact with your own exhibits, read your own labels, use the visitors' restroom instead of the employee one, eat in your café. And compare it to other places—not just museums, but places like shopping malls and movie theaters and amusement parks. This is what your visitors do.

3. Care. Caring is often the difference between bad and good, good and great. Care about your visitors, about their comfort and their happiness. And here's the hard part: care for them more than you care about your co-workers or your vendors or even sometimes your donors. This distinction comes up a lot during these meetings we call "brainstorming sessions." You know, those meetings where there are no bad ideas. Well, I hate to burst anyone's bubble here, but most ideas are bad ideas. Only a very few are good ones, and even fewer of these turn out to be good realities. As Linus Pauling said, "The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas." When the bad ideas start flying, advocate for your visitors. Are we really doing it for them? What will they get out of it? Can we do better?

And so we come to the end of our journey, from the practical to the profound. Hopefully you've gotten a few tips on how putting your visitors first can be accomplished, but more importantly why this matters in the first place. In the beginning, it might seem like a chore to include them in your work, just like practicing cracking an egg or playing a musical instrument is a chore at first. But after awhile it will become easier and then even enjoyable. These people we call visitors really are lovely people once you get to know them.

Barbara Ceiga serves as director of exhibits for The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

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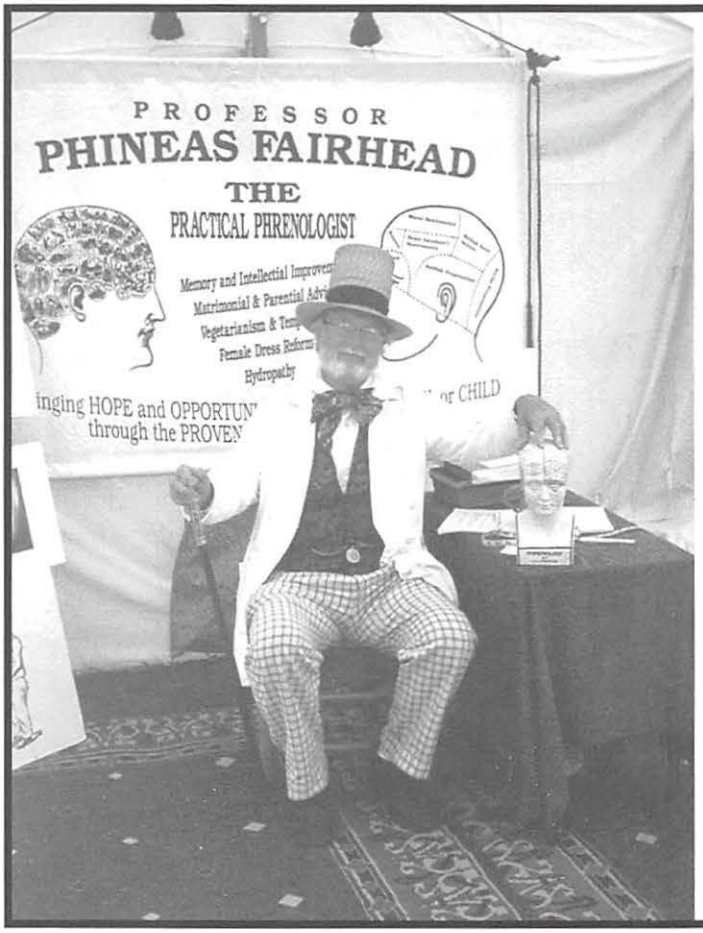

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Creation in the Hand: The Life in Folk Art Dolls

BY
BY MEGAN MACGREGOR

While my childhood is ripe with memories of dolls I have almost forgotten my encounters with them in museums. In these institutions, dolls often appear as part of the half remembered jumble of lifeless toys strategically placed on the second story of a house museum's nursery, or in hands-on activities where groups of tiny hands create watered down versions of the original. In both cases they often seem to be dismissed with the simple interpretation of, "They had dolls back then." These small ambassadors have so much more to offer than that. My research into the history of dolls has shown me that they have been companions to human kind almost as long as the dog and have been accepted into every culture. If they have united the whole of the human experience why not use them to bridge the gap between now and the past? Dolls provide a perfect tool for interpretation because museum visitors can relate to them. Almost every child growing up possessed a Barbie, a GI Joe, or any other of the countless action figures and dolls whose advertisements saturated the breaks between Saturday morning cartoons. Folk dolls in particular are excellent guides to the past. These little demigods are an interpreter's dream. They reflect the people who created them and allow for a wide-ranging dialogue about children, trade, money, and family.

The Tarble Arts Center at Eastern Illinois University defines folk art as hand-made objects created by a non-academically trained artist that conveys some form of individual expression and may also represent the shared aesthetic traditions of an ethnic, religious, family group, community, or geographic area. Usually such art passes from one generation to the next and often comes from a craft tradition, rather than a fine arts tradition, and may also include self-taught artists, along with those historically classified as 'naïve,' 'primitive,' or 'outsider.' Beneath this definition fits all manner of arts and crafts that everyday people have been creating for their own needs since the beginning of time. While this may stir up images of baskets and portraits it also includes those small things easily forgotten in the grand scheme of things. Such is the nature of dolls. The key factor that separates a folk art doll from Barbie is how it is made. Folk dolls are created by hand, rather then by machine, out of any materials available to their creators. People who make them do it for both the enjoyment of the process and for the finished doll itself. Each doll is a conscious individual creation; they are not just rattled off in piles. The individualistic nature that comes from conscious creation of folk art dolls makes them rich sources on information about their maker's past, economic and cultural traditions. They are rich with exhibit possibilities. Folk artist Marilyn Kinnett, who learned to make dolls during the depression, came from a family with a tradition of making folk dolls. By looking at her processes and her creations we can extract a very wide sweeping narrative about her and her world that has potential for incorporation into historic site programming.

For Marilyn, doll making is equated with family, especially its female network. Her mother and grandmother both taught her to make dolls. They showed her how to sew by hand and how to use a sewing machine. They also taught her how to make dolls with available odds and ends, such as potato mashers, wooden spoons and corn husks. This tradition of making dolls out of any available material is a common feature of folk dolls.[1]

The materials that children and adults used to make dolls reflected the environments in which they lived, and their economic status. For example, a middle class farming family in the late 1800s might have a doll with a homemade body and a china head bought from a local store or a peddler.[2] The stuffing of the dolls body, animal hair or plant fibers, would

reflect the natural environment in which they lived, whereas the china head shows that they had disposable income and connections to, and participation in, the industrial market. On the other hand, a doll that a London street urchin made from a discarded shoe in 1901 reflects her manufactured, urban environment and destitute condition.[3] In Marilyn's case, the materials used by her mother, grandmother and herself, wooden spoons, cloth, corn husks, potato mashers, and apples, we can discern that she grew up in a semi-rural farming environment. Potato mashers, cloth and wooden spoons are store goods but apples and corn husks are products of a rural farming community. Marilyn states that "...we made things from everything imaginable. Everything nature had to make dolls."[4]

Marilyn was born in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression, when toys were the last thing a family would spend money on. This frugality is reflected in the rag dolls that she and her mother made. They never bought cloth specifically for dolls. The material always came from her mothers "endless rag bag," and Marilyn described stuffing them with, "...anything we could find, from old hose, old cotton hose, to comfort bedding, ya know. Anything we could find to stuff with."[5]

Marilyn's mother's specialty was rag dolls. She used her own patterns, as well as those which her husband's mother passed down to her. These patterns were part of a wider commercial trend that began around 1880 with the popularization of the domestic sewing machine. Factory production had decreased the quality of wooden dolls and as a result, combined with the sewing machine, there was an increase in the home manufacturing of rag dolls. This was accompanied by a flurry of magazine articles and books on doll making as well as pieces of cloth that had dolls preprinted on them so that the maker only had to cut out the doll, sew it and stuff it. A typical article on doll making is the one published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1902, which gives detailed instructions on how to make a "well-made and well-dressed rag doll," and includes a pattern.[6] The closure of the major doll factories in Germany and France due to the First World War strengthened the cloth doll movement even further.[7] It is likely that some of the patterns that were passed down to Marilyn's mother came from this rise to riches for the rag doll.

Just as her mother-in-law had done, Marilyn's mother passed on the patterns and the art of doll making to her daughter. When Marilyn married and had children she taught them. Doll-making became a way of initiating new female members into the family. This was done in the passing on of patterns from Marilyn's paternal grandmother to her mother, and later by Marilyn herself, when she taught her daughter-in-law how to sew stuffed animals. "So we sat down one day [with] all the patterns and ... she started in and she makes beautiful animals."[8] Sewing was a way of interacting with and creating relationships among the female members of the family, as well as a means of passing on the tradition of doll making. The passing on of doll making from one generation to the next serves as a bonding experience between those generations. These learning experiences create memories carried with the student through life in the craft that they learned. Thus to create a doll revives memories of family:

> I have an apple head grandmother and grandfather up on the beam. And those are the ones that my grandmother taught me how to do in an old summer kitchen. She would sit with the apples, and she would peel the apples first and then cut the pieces and then hang them up to dry, and as it dried I'd watch the pieces change, and when it was thoroughly dried she's [unintelligible] with the pipe cleaners that were my grandfather's [unintelligible], dress them as people, and they'd be believable. ...Nice warm feeling to think that I can pass something on that my grandmother helped me learn.[9]

Marilyn still recalled this memory when she was fifty-two years old and had a small fleet of grandchildren of her own. By passing on the art of apple head doll making to her children and grandchildren, as it was taught to her, she, symbolically, passes on her grandmother to what would have been her great and great-great grandchildren.

The apple head dolls are particularly auspicious in the passing on of memories of family members. As a fruit, apples have been with us for about as long as dolls have. Dried apple remains have been found in Switzerland that date back to the Neolithic era.[10] Like humans, the humble apple is "a readily adaptable form of life. Its rich gene pool yields to infinite variations both in fruit and in the adaptability of the plant to climactic conditions."[11] This wondrous variety gives each apple its own personality. This personality is revealed when the apple is peeled, carved, and set up to dry. Each head, despite the fact that they might have all been carved alike, takes on the face of a unique character.[12] By making apple head dolls, Marilyn keeps her grandmothers memory alive, but at the same time creates something new and unique for the next generation.

By teaching Marilyn how to make dolls, her mother and grandmother taught her a skill and a medium through which to be creative. Being good at something instilled confidence in Marilyn and made her feel more comfortable in the world. People admired her skills and she felt confident enough to set up a small shop in Rossville, Illinois, called Little Folks N' Country Critters, where she sold her dolls. In this respect, her doll-making allowed her to communicate with the people and children who came into her store. The original American apple head dolls served the same purpose. The Oneidas and

Seneca who lived in the northeastern United States made them from crab-apples and later, after European settlement, apples. They were used to make "happy heads or wish dolls" that represented the spirit Loose Feet, who granted small children wishes. These dolls were given to children not as playthings but as symbols of good fortune.[13] These dolls allowed children to talk directly to Loose Feet and ask him for assistance. This gave children a sense of protection, which, in turn, could foster self-confidence.

Apples themselves have a history in America as being a sign of control and comfort. The first apple trees came with the French and British settlers.[14] "By 1638 William Baxton of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had established the first American apple orchard [only eight years after the founding the colony]."[15] The early settlers were afraid of the wilderness in which they found themselves and the apple tree, as a domesticated fauna, became a way for them to symbolically tame the land and give them confidence in their new home. As part of this representative of Charles I decreed, in 1641, "that anyone receiving 100 acres must plant apple trees."[16] This stipulation continued later on when the Northwest Territory was opened up. A land grant there, "required a settler to 'set out at least fifty apple or pear trees' as a condition of his deed. The purpose of this rule was to… [encourage] homesteaders to put down roots. Since a standard apple tree normally took ten years to fruit, an orchard was a mark of lasting settlement."[17] In this way, apples were a sign civilization that gave a settler some reassurance and confidence that the wilderness he found himself in would not swallow him up by providing him with a mental link to home.

Apple, and the dolls made from them, became a security blanket for the early settlers and pioneers to cling to as they faced the greater wilderness of the world. A settler looking out his front door into a small grove of reassuring apple trees could stand a little taller, feeling secure in the wilderness and confident that he could make it, even if this confidence was falsely brought on by applejacks.

One of the first things Marilyn remembers about doll making is her mother's "endless rag bag, because she made some for everyone in town, rag dolls…"[18] In this way dolls, for Marilyn became associated with community and giving, especially to the communities smallest members; its children. Like her mother, her doll making "started out as a hobby with my own children and my neighbor's children and all my relatives too. Always had to have a doll or a [stuffed] animal for a birthday, Christmas or whatever."[19] Later, once her kids had outgrown her toys, she opened Little Folks N' Country Critters in order to sell the dolls and animals that she still enjoyed making. The shop was a larger manifestation of her mothers "endless rag bag." This is apparent in the nature of the shop. Marilyn allowed the children who came full range of the store, allowing them to pick up and play with everything.

> The kids were all, "Don't touch anything," when they went into a store. Nothing was to be touched. And in this store they can come in and pretty well pick things up, do what they want to with them. They don't damage 'em. I have very little damage from … children except picking things up and putting things down maybe in the wrong place, which I do when I deal with them.[20]

Marilyn's store was not about profit; it was about seeing the children's faces and interacting with them. "…[T]his is the main point of it, to see the children's faces when they walk in the door and they see this animal or this doll... Well I really enjoy this. The children are so good."[21] Marilyn's dolls were made to be played with and used by the community's children. They were not made to be put on display by adults. Little Folks N' Country Critters made dolls a sign of community by bringing children and their parents in contact with Marilyn and her family. In early America, apples achieved the same importance. As stated above, apples were a sign of community. "Every small village had its cider mill operating during late summer and fall." The mill became a meeting place for the community. Apple head dolls are also community oriented. It is very common to find them in pairs, as is the case with the old man and woman that the Tarble Arts Center acquired from Marilyn. More recently "apple head dolls [have been] made in groups as part of scenarios holding special meaning for the doll maker."[22]

Folk dolls have not gone untouched by consumerism. The most striking case of their brush with it can be seen in the story of Mary McAboy of Montana and her Skookum dolls. Mary McAboy appears to have learned how to make apple head dolls from her mother. Like Marilyn's mother, her mother made them, when Mary was growing up, for friends but also sold them at social events. When Mary's husband died she remembered this skill and sent in an application to the United States Patent office for a patent on a man and a woman apple head doll dressed as Indians, which she called Skookums.[23] Skookum means 'good' in Chinook Indian's language.[24] She was granted her patent four months later in February 1914 and began to make and sell her Skookum dolls. They became very popular, so much so that she was able to sell the business to Harry Heye Tammen, of H.H. Tammen Company, who began to distribute them in San Francisco, New York, Canada, and Mexico.[25] While Mary remained in charge of the dolls assembly for 38 years, the materials used to make the dolls changed. The apple heads were replaced with composite heads and later, in the 1940s by plastic heads.[26] The instant that Mary's dolls left her hands

and were produced on the large scale by hundreds of hands they ceased to be folk dolls. The making of the doll is the key to whether or not it is folk art. Making the dolls by hand is what separates mass produced dolls from the folk dolls.

While folk dolls cannot be mass-produced by machines, the materials and reasons for making them can change. With the Industrial Revolution and modern technology, materials have become more widely available and, according to Marilyn, has improved in quality. "...yarn has improved, you know, by the way. Beautiful yarn now, and everything is better; the thread, the material."[27] Since what is available to people has changed, it is only natural that the material out of which dolls are constructed has changed. It is the natural process of folk art dolls; use what is available. Marilyn bought and scavenged material for her dolls. Naturally, the amount of disposable income played a part in how much material she could buy and how much she had to scavenge. When she had her children, she made dolls out of the material scraps from the clothes she made them, but once they were gone she began to purchase material specifically for making dolls.[28] Consumerism has also changed the look of folk dolls through its cultural influence. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans the Oneidas and Seneca's dolls "were unclothed except for occasional husk garments. Later dolls wore a blend of European and Indian costumes reflecting the tribal habit and contact with the white settlers."[29] The same was true for folk dolls around the turn of the twentieth century. German doll manufactures had perfected the use of china for doll heads and began selling the heads, arms, and legs separately so that parents could buy them and attach them to homemade bodies. In this way folk doll hybrids were created.[30]

Pop culture has also affected folk dolls. Marilyn made a Jiminy Cricket doll after the one in Walt Disney's Pinocchio.[31] He is a pop culture icon, but Marilyn created the pattern for him and sewed him by hand. Consumerism has also changed the way the dolls are used. While all of Marilyn's dolls were meant to be used and played with by children, many of the apple head dolls made today are created to be works of art or for display. Today "apple head dolls [are] often made in groups as part of scenarios..." which recreate "local settings, scenes from American history and famous plays."[32] In the end, what sets folk dolls apart from industrial dolls is the fact that they are born from one set of hands and placed directly into another's. There is heart and memory placed into each doll which transfers over to the new owner, who builds onto the memories. They do not arrive fresh from the box without context behind them.

Folk art dolls hold a special place in folk art. Their creation can inform us about the physical and mental world in which their creators grew up during their formative years of childhood. No matter whether it's an apple head doll, a rag doll or a lovingly revamped discarded shoe, these dolls cannot be swallowed up by commercialism. Like a magic trick, the instant the hands and mind of a maker and their conscious individual creation are replaced with doldrum repletion of the machine or multiple hands, the trick is revealed and the magic is lost. This is not to say that folk dolls cannot be made and sold in large numbers. Marilyn Kinnett's Little Folks N' Country Critters is proof that a maker of folk dolls can retain their artistic integrity and function in harmony with consumerism.

A folk doll, because it is a conscious creation with so much put into it, becomes a small window into the world of its makers and owners. Using a doll as a table of contents for the time period of your site would be a good way to guide children's groups. By simply asking them, 'What is it made of?' you can lead them into the natural and man made resources available to people and the kinds of skills people possessed that allowed them to make the doll. Or you could jump off into family ties and holidays and the lives of children. 'Imagine if this single doll was your only real toy. What are some of the games you could play with it?' Even if you are talking to a group of boys and girls, you could easily grab the boys' attention by pointing out that this was the equivalent of an action figure, or that a doll would need accessories such as carved horses and beds and houses that boys and girls could create together. A doll table of contents could work just as well for guiding a group of adults. By posing the same question of 'What is it made of, and how did they get it?' you can invite them to pose that question to all of the artifacts they see and begin to construct an idea of the processes that made up the life of people during that time. Or you could put on a work shop where people are invited to bring their old cloths and rags and learn how to make rag dolls. You could go round the room and try to interpret people's lives from their dolls. The possibilities are truly endless. So let us take our dolls off the shelf and breathe life into them so that others may be caught in their glow and stop to wonder why.

Megan MacGregor is a member of the Historical Administration Class of 2007 at Eastern Illinois University. She is currently completing a six month internship at the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford in her home state of Massachusetts.

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Notes:

1. Jaffe, *The History of Toys*, 122.
2. Lavitt, *The Knopf Collectors' Guides to American Antiques: Dolls*, 12.
3. Jaffe, *The History of Toys*, 123.
4. Marilyn Kinnett, interview by Jan Laude, ½ inch reel, Folk Art interview, Rossville, IL, Aug. 16, 1983, Tarble Arts Center.
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11. Fred Lape, *Apples and Man* (NY; Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1979), 9.
12. Lavitt, *American Folk Dolls*, 59.
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15. Boria Sax, "Apples," 4.
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Opening Doors to Great Guest Experiences
Multimedia in Review:
Conner Prairie's Efforts Towards an Interpretive Training Tool

Editor's Note:

The DVD reviewed below is the culmination of a grant project at Conner Prairie Museum in Fishers, Indiana. A study was begun in 1997 by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for the purpose of affirming the educational value of museums. With their combined resources, they created the Museum Learning Collaborative (MLC), made up of educational research experts whose goal was to use the existing research on museum learning to develop a theoretical framework by which museum learning could be analyzed. In 1999, along with such museums as Exploratorium, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, the Indianapolis Children's Museum, and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Conner Prairie joined the MLC's twelve-museum partnership for study and collaboration. Conner Prairie began their own separate learning study the next year. From these extensive research projects, a need for better interpretive training was discovered. ***Opening Doors to Great Guest Experiences*** *is an attempt to fulfill that need.*

The editorial team decided that it would be beneficial to give two different perspectives for this review—one from the point of view of an administrator who would be choosing this resource for his or her site, and one from the point of view of the front-line interpreter and volunteer who would be viewing it and putting its lessons into practice.

Tom Walsh, Volunteer Interpreter, Volkening Heritage Farm, Schuamburg, Illinois

Interpreters, both professional and volunteer, are always looking for ways to improve their delivery techniques. This CD/DVD set delivers valuable aids to that discovery, is a good tool for either individual or group use, is and well worth the price. The presentation is professionally delivered. The staff and consultants speak clearly, and I had no trouble understanding the concepts they were delivering. Some of the material can be delivered in a variety of ways, making it ideal for either individual or group use.

I am a volunteer interpreter. This means that I am not able to spend forty hours or more a week on the art of interpreting. While I have had excellent mentors and many professionals willing to share their time and expertise when it comes to content and context, it is rare that we have taken the opportunity to evaluate the quality of delivery. Everyone has their own style and method of delivery, no one of which is always "the best." This tool will help with improving my own delivery, and will be even better when used with a group of interpreters from my site. It is the kind of aid that is going to be best used over time, as you cannot expect this or any other device to perform miracles overnight.

The first DVD has a total running time of 91 minutes and 35

Rick Finch, Site Manager, Fort Meigs State Memorial, Perrysburg, Ohio

I am always surprised when I discover a living history museum that spends no time training their historical interpreters in interpretive theory. Sites often spend so much time making sure the research is right, the site is historically accurate, and the period clothing is spot-on that they forget about one of the most important aspects of the museum—interpretation. However, when we overlook the interpretation we do ourselves and our guests a great disservice. Your site can have the best artifacts, the best period clothing, and the most historically accurate setting, but if the interpretation is poor, then everything else suffers. Many sites say they do not have resources or know where to begin to provide training in interpretive theory. Conner Prairie has developed a teaching tool with these sites in mind.

Opening Doors to Great Guest Experiences is an excellent resource for use in training your historical interpreters to be more engaging with your guests. The training package contains a DVD and a CD-ROM with supplemental information and training exercises. This package is designed so that it can be used in a group setting or taken home and reviewed individually.

Conner Prairie uses their site as a case study to provide you

seconds. This is if you do not stop to pause and reflect about the scenarios being presented. If you are using Opening Doors on your own, it might be acceptable to view the entire first DVD in one sitting. However, to gain any benefit from the set, plan on using several sessions for the exercises. Take a piece back to your site, evaluate it, try something new, and then experience another exercise or two. During my first viewing, I made several notes about ideas that I plan on trying this spring.

It would be beneficial to have someone at your site serve as a facilitator to explain the first two sections of the first disc, the Introduction and Great Motivations. This would explain how the project came to pass, the planning and research of the presentation, as well why guests may be coming to your site. Then start looking at the rest of the sections: More About Our Guests, Interpretive Skills, and Guest Experience Assessment.

The second disc contains the training resources and exercises. These are well worth the time. I will use them individually and hope to be able to use them with a group of other interpreters. Some are a few pictures with a handful of thought provoking questions you can use in any scenario and in any type of museum setting. One of the exercises I reviewed was an interactive simulation to help determine if our areas had too many items of interest and would overwhelm our guests. It was an interesting and thoughtful piece. I also appreciated the Guest Experience Assessment Guide. It explains the steps necessary to create your own methods of guest experience evaluation and what to do with the information once you get it.

While all of the sections of the discs have something to offer, some may appeal to you or be more applicable to your site. For me, perhaps the best exercise is the Using Your Environment discussion in the Interpretive Skills section. Here, the group discusses the diversity of our guests and what we can do to make them comfortable. The level of comfort determines the quality of the learning experience. Diversity in this context is not only cultural background, but age and physical presence. They suggest we look at each area on the site and determine if there are impediments to any guest's enjoyment. When I heard this, I immediately thought of the animals on our site. Most can be seen by any size of person (short child to tall adult), at least from some angle or position. For example, the chickens are surrounded by a solid board fence. Here strategic placement of benches allows the children to see over the top of the fence. The Using Your Environment section also suggests doing this exercise in the house and provides suggestions for best displaying those items that can not be changed or moved for all guests. There are exercises for this entire section on the second disc. These consist of not only a simple interactive one, but others that can be printed and taken to the various stations on your site so you or a group can determine if improvements can be made.

with ideas on how to improve your guest experiences. Each chapter in the DVD is peppered with discussions amongst their staff about what they do and how it helps their site. While this may sound annoying to some people, if you listen to what they have to say you can pick up some helpful advice.

The DVD, hosted by Roy Underhill and Lynn Dierking, provides insight into creating quality hands-on and "minds-on" (inquiry-based) interpretation. The DVD is divided into five chapters that help your site provide better guest experiences by looking at the whole of what you do and putting it all together.

The main topics of discussion are guests, historical interpretation, and evaluation. A large portion of the DVD is spent on improving interpretive skills. The hosts ask you to think about your environment and whether it helps or hinders interaction with your guests. You need to think about issues that will affect your guests before they actually arrive. The hosts remind you to remember accessibility too. Look at your site for anachronisms or barriers that inhibit the experience of your guests. Try to remove as many of these barriers as possible to create the best guest experience.

The DVD provides a practical approach by showing video clips of actual interpretation at Conner Prairie so you can see how you can put all of this information together. I particularly like this section because they provide you with opportunities to pause the DVD and discuss the interpretation you just watched. They ask you to discuss what you think went well with the interpretation and how you might do it differently. Conner Prairie staff members then provide their own critiques of the video clips discussing what they thought went well and also what they could do differently the next time to improve the experience. This is an area that everyone should view and it may give you the idea to do something similar at your own site.

Another practical area of the DVD deals with guest assessment. The hosts explain that you really cannot know what is working well and what needs to be improved unless you assess your programs. A good way to do this is through guest surveys. The hosts provide you with ideas to create basic surveys so that you can begin to receive feedback from your guests.

The second portion of this training package is a CD-ROM that contains training exercises to supplement the information from the DVD. This is worth the price of the training package itself. The CD-ROM provides over forty different exercises to improve your interpretation. Each section on the CD-ROM reinforces what you have learned on the DVD. Lastly, the CD-ROM provides you with examples to begin your own assessment program. The Guest Experience Assessment Handbook contains is a how-to manual to begin learning more about your guests and their needs. Just as importantly, the CD-

They also explore using all five senses. We know "touch" is big with guests, and when you have animals "smell" certainly becomes an opportunity for discussion, but I found their conversation of "sound" to be something that I had not considered before.

Not all was perfect with the presentation, however. There were no instructions as to how to make your way through the DVD. At first, a toolbar appeared at the bottom of the screen, but it disappeared as the presentation started. It is easily brought back, but only if you decide to take action. I just moved the mouse and it materialized, but it would have been nice if they told me that. Although you can point to a button on the toolbar to see what it does, it took away from my concentration of the presentation. I have noticed that some of us volunteers not only were born, but grew up, long before computers were a common means of communication. A simple instruction sheet inserted behind the attractive cover of the disc holder would have solved many of my frustrations.

I would also add a table of contents to the Guest Experience Assessment Guide, since it is rather long. As I use it in the future, I may want help getting to a specific page quickly. There were issues with the web links provided, as well. It was not clear that your internet browser had to be open before clicking on the How to Use These Materials web link, and even when I had the browser open I could not make the connection. I was able to go to openingdoors.connerprairie.org as suggested in the cover slip and view the Training User's Handbook, but the link to download the entire handbook was broken. As of this writing, the individual sections are still available and free to print off.

The interactive exercises on Disc Two perhaps fall short of their potential. While illustrative of the point being made, they were also too simple in their execution. As we all become more technologically advanced, I can—perhaps unfortunately—see using these techniques more often. They will have to be more sophisticated to hold the attention of the younger generation.

Even so, the discs are worth the cost and time to use them. Various exercises can be pulled out as the interpretive season progresses so you can evaluate your skills and your site one piece at a time. In addition, this is the kind of tool that I am likely to revisit once a year to see what I forgot to do last year and how I can make the coming year a little better. I will try different exercises and get different peoples' opinions over time. The best part about *Opening Doors* is that it fits the needs of any kind of site that has interpreters—living history, environmental, and even just good old-fashioned static museums. Any place that has interpreters available to talk to guests would benefit from going through the exercises provided. My advice to you is to use it, and enjoy it.

ROM provides you with training and evaluation forms to begin assessing your own interpretation, too.

While this is not the only training your site should provide, this training package will help any museum—big or small—with their interpretive training. *Opening Doors to Great Guest Experiences* gives sites with limited training time and money some excellent, easy-to-use resources for helping improve the way we, as interpreters, engage our guests.

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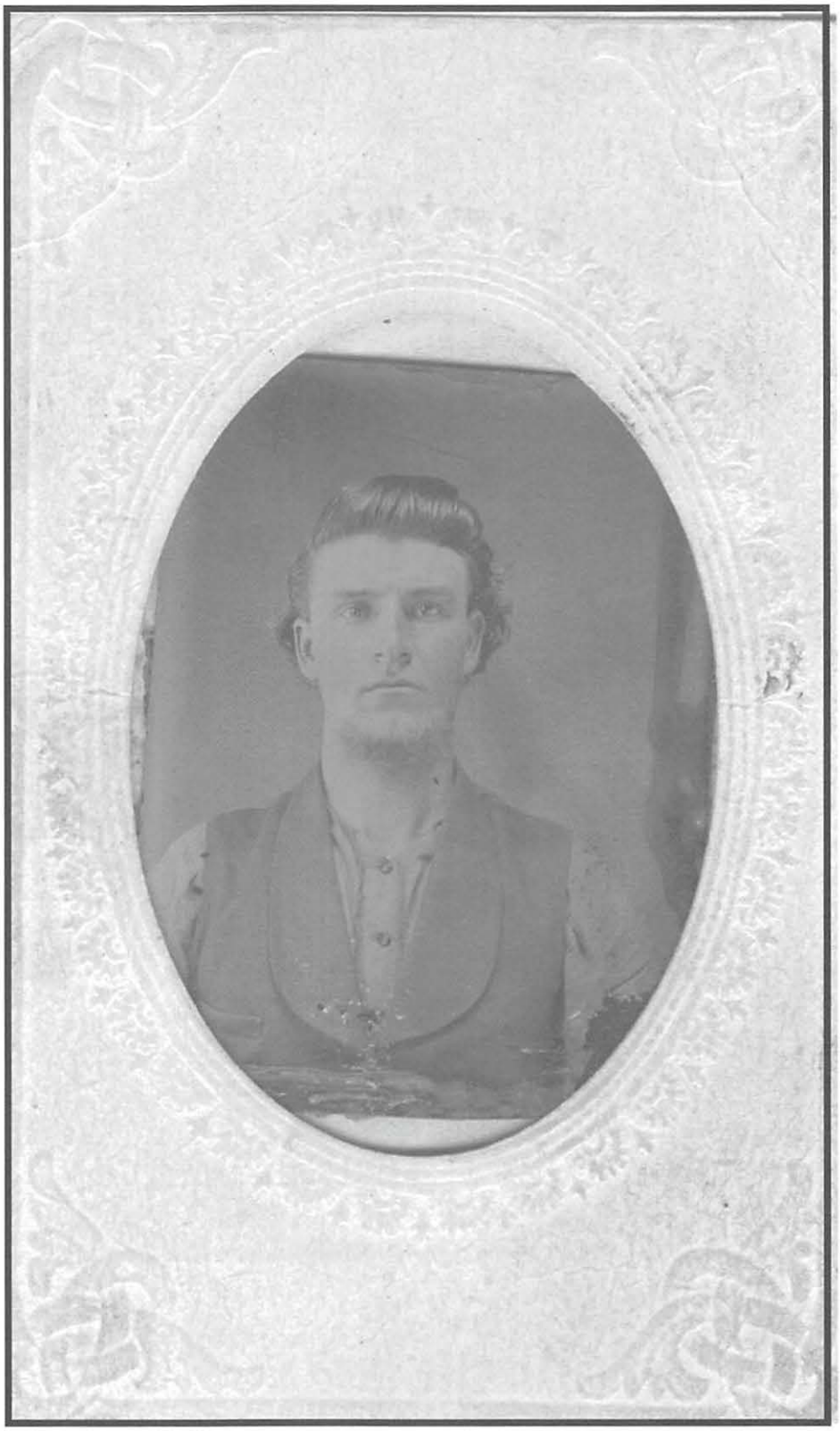
A MOMENT IN TIME

Edited by
Laura Daugherty



The coatless gent in this tintype is most certainly a working man of the 1860s. He wears a colored shirt buttoned up to a simple band collar with what appear to be ringer-style china buttons. It is difficult to discern from this photo whether the edges of the placket are badly frayed or have some kind of decorative topstitching. His vest looks to be of wool, with a shawl collar and a small welt pocket on the breast.

He sports some nice chin whiskers but is clean-shaven on the sides. His ear-length hair is combed back and down on the sides, while the top is swept up and over the top of his head in a feat of hairstyling that can be accomplished only with copious amounts of grease or pomade.

The lovely young woman in this carte-de-visite is neatly, if simply dressed for the early 1870s. Her dress displays a low armscye, which helps date this photo to the earlier years seventies. The bodice is not perfectly fitted—there is too much fabric around the armscye, and the darts seem overly long. Perhaps she has made do with a hand-me-down.

She makes up for the somewhat sloppy fit with her accessories and hairdo. In classic 1870s style, the neckline of her dress is accented with a standing white frill and black velvet ribbon. A white or light-colored ribbon is tied in a bow and pinned at the neck. Though many women in the 1870s opted for more complex cascading curls and puffs, she has chosen to dress her hair in a very smooth and confined manner. It appears that she has arranged the back hair high on the head in two rolls that wrap around her head. This was likely accomplished by rolling her hair over sausage-shaped rats. She has reserved a small section of hair at the front, which is parted in the center, combed over the front roll, and secured under the back roll. A neat bow finishes the look.

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A MOMENT IN TIME

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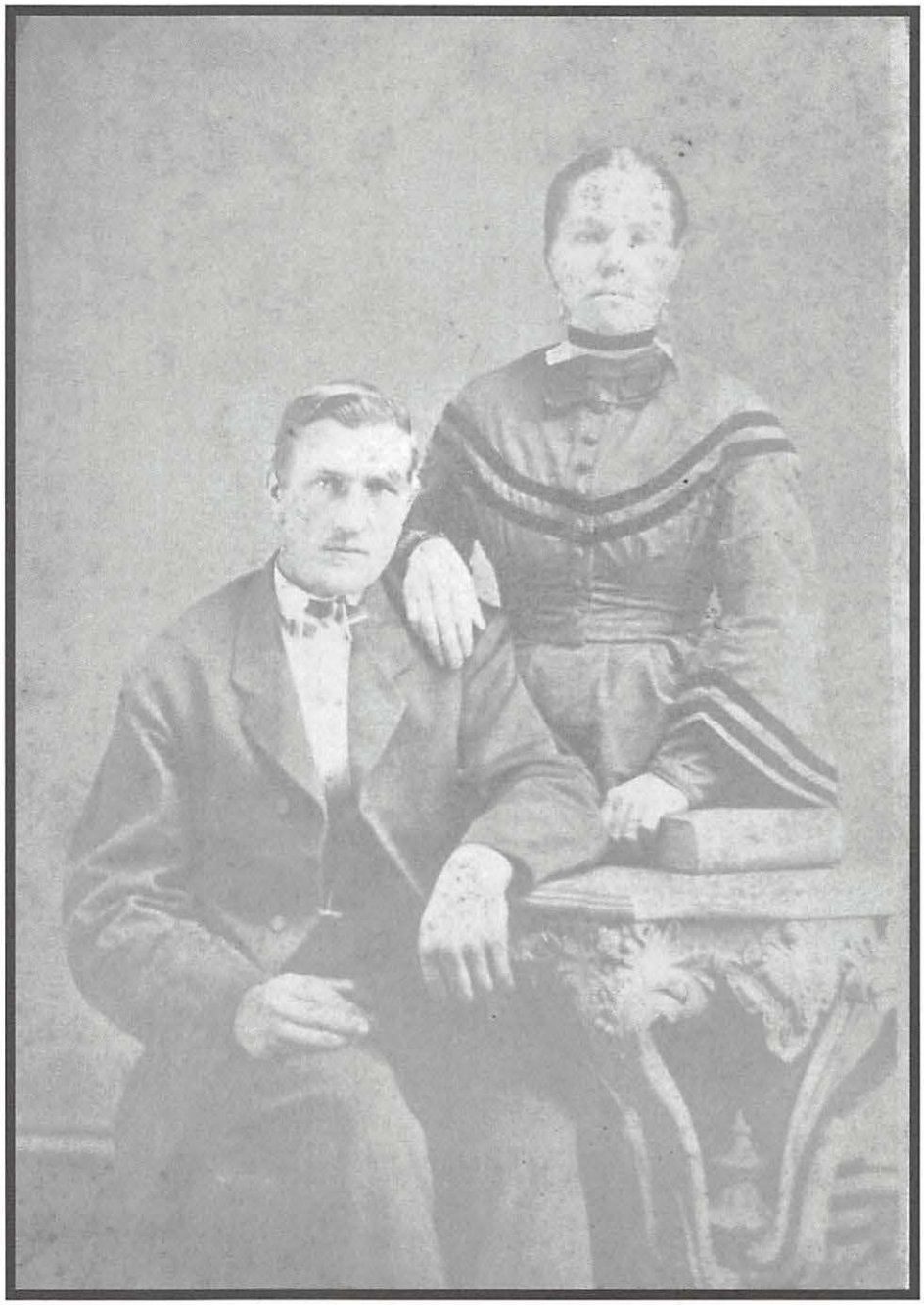

Dated 1869, this photograph appears to be a later enlargement of a carte-de-visite. The couple is identified on the back as Mr. and Mrs. Gotlieb Hegendof(?), who perhaps were recent immigrants. Mr. Hegendof is dressed in a dapper sack coat of fine wool. His trousers are of a different fabric, which appears to be striped. A striped tie tops off his crisp white shirt. His vest is obscured in the shadow of his coat, but a watch chain peeks out slightly.

Mrs. Hegendof's outfit is a bit more complicated (and confusing). In typical late-sixties style, her bodice is decorated with rows of banding to give the illusion of a yoke, and the skirt is arranged with a flat front. Her low-set pagoda sleeves, however, are out of character for this late date. The undersleeves are more bizarre; they appear to be made of the same fabric as the dress, rather than of the usual fine white cotton, linen, or lace. These out-of-date and eccentric details, along with the not-quite-perfect fit of the bodice, suggest that perhaps she has made over an earlier dress.

Maybe trying to make up for this, she comes off as a little too exuberant with her accessories. Not only does she sport an embroidered white collar and ribbon bow, but she also adds a modish black velvet choker. In addition, she wears drop earrings and a bracelet on her right wrist.

The young woman pictured in this carte-de-visite copy of a daguerreotype is the epitome of the late 1840s. Her hair is arranged in wide puffs over the ears, resulting in the infamous "hammerhead shark" look. The darkness of her hair sets off her incredibly pale skin. A whitework collar peeks out over the high neckline, which is accented by a wide ribbon bow. Her capped sleeves, not quite so tight as in the mid-forties, flare out gently to reveal white undersleeves. Black braided trim decorates the caps and cuffs. Her bodice is worn well fitted over the flat-fronted corset, though the seaming at center front appears to have been altered and is slightly off-center. She wears a ring set with a dark stone on one ring finger.

An accomplished seamstress was certainly behind the creation of this unidentified woman's fantastic dress. Judging from the low armscye, the evenly pleated waist treatment, the round shape of the hoop, and the lack of a revenue stamp on the back, this carte-de-visite can be dated to the early sixties. Made of a lovely, lightweight wool, the bodice is perfectly and smoothly fitted over a well-corseted shape. The skirt is arranged with evenly spaced inverted box pleats. A neat geometric design of dark fabric (velvet?) banding and matching fabric-covered buttons trims the hemline.

The sleeves, however, are the most distinctive aspect of this ensemble. The top of the sleeve is pleated into the armscye and adorned with more covered buttons. The remainder of the sleeve is gathered into soft graduated puffs that come in close at the wrist. It is a creative and well-executed twist on the common bishop sleeve. The woman's outfit is tastefully finished off with a neat white collar and cuffs, a smart belt with a decorative buckle, and a brooch and drop earrings. Her hair is smoothly arranged over her ears, probably with the assistance of small rats for width, and is gathered into a low arrangement in the back.

'We're not Actors': Historical Interpreters as Reluctant Edutainers

BY

Scott Magelssen

Dulce et utile.

--Horace, *Ars Poetica*

Living history museums, like Plimoth Plantation, Colonial Williamsburg, and Old Sturbridge Village, heavily incorporate performance practices into their historical programming. Indeed, "living" museums differ by their very nature from other historical institutions with their use of costumed interpreters and three-dimensional simulated historical environments in addition to (or in lieu of) displayed collections of historical artifacts. Yet, while living history museum curators and interpreters routinely make use of performance techniques from theatre, relatively few of them consider themselves actors or their historiographic practices as a kind of theatre. Most often preferring "educator" as the descriptor of choice, these individuals explicitly distance themselves from theatrical connotations, frequently dismissing the latter as "scripted," "false," "just entertainment," "melodramatic," or "Disney-esque."

It has been long established that theatre and performance are powerful tools in shaping museum visitors' historical understanding—often for the very reasons that make "theatre" a dirty word in museum discourse: a strong and compelling narrative, emotional investment, and entertaining presentation. I argue, however, that interpreters' reluctance to acknowledge their part in a theatrical enterprise, coupled with strict or limiting definitions of theatre (heavily relying on outdated notions) is detrimental to the visitors' experience, and precludes the potential for museum programming to incorporate newer and more efficacious practices that have more recently emerged in theatre and pedagogy.

Twenty years ago, Stephen Eddy Snow paved the way for the discussion of living history as "theatre" by grounding his signature study of Plimoth Plantation in theatre and performance studies theory, as well as his own experience there as a performer and interpreter. Central to Snow's argument is the widespread shift at museums over the past forty years from traditional presentation of artifacts in dioramic display to a living, breathing simulated community with costumed characters playing historic personae.[1] More recently, cultural anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable dub a similar commitment to a naturalistic mode of historic interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg "mimetic" or "progressive realism."[2]

While living history may properly be called a kind of theatre by academics (for reasons carefully articulated by Snow, Handler and Gable and others—including myself), the disparities between these academics and the "front-line" interpretation staff signals the need for a more rigorous interrogation of how living history practitioners view their historiographic methodology, as these views are intimately linked to the visitors' reception of the historical narratives these institutions are responsible for disseminating.

The following account organizes and addresses the responses I received when asking living history practitioners whether they viewed their occupation as "theatre." I purposefully chose the word "theatre" instead of "performance" when questioning people in my interviews, and deliberately left "theatre" undefined and open-ended in order to provoke a firm stance—a stance prompting, perhaps, more disagreement than would the more general (read wishy-washy) stance one might take over "performance," a much bigger umbrella term. I hoped such disagreement could offer a space where one could see the inadequacies of traditional understandings of theatre in discussing the performative possibilities at living history museums.

By far the most frequently expressed notion I found in circulation is that living history interpretation is not theatre because it "doesn't use a script." This is the official stance visitors will find in *The Visitor's Companion* to Colonial Williamsburg: "Character interpreters are not actors; they have no script. Every character is prepared to converse freely on a variety of topics from politics to childbearing."[3] Diane Landon, formerly with the Theatrical Productions Department at Colonial Williamsburg, explained some of her own reasons for this distinction when I spoke with her in June, 2000. "[T]heatre is a pretty consistent thing," she says:

> [T]here is a pre-planned rehearsed dialogue that the actors learn, and there is a director saying "you will do this" and "you'll do that" and "you'll do that." Living history, on the other hand, is just that: it's living, it's breathing, it's free form [...]. They're not actors [...]. [Museum interpreters] work from objectives. Their objective is to portray Peyton Randolph, and this is what we knew about Peyton Randolph, and through this presentation at one o'clock, we, the audience, will learn this aspect of Peyton Randolph, but there's no script. It's all up to Peyton Randolph to sort of improvise and bring the audience to this point. So it's more of a role playing, classroom technique than it is a staged theatrical presentation.[4]

Other museum workers with whom I spoke related stories in which new interpreters came to the sites with a theatre background and had a hard time making the transition to living interpretation. Barney Barnes, in Interpretive Program Development at Colonial Williamsburg, says that while a theatrical background is often very useful to an interpreter, there are actors who struggle to adapt to in-character interaction with visitors. "I mean they're really, 'Oh my God, I don't have a prepared response for that. I don't know how to handle that.' So they really depend on that kind of distance that a proscenium kind of presentation offers."[5]

Cynthia Gedraitis, Supervisor with the Colonial Interpretation Department at Plimoth Plantation, gave me an example of when this happened at Plimoth's Pilgrim Village: "We had a young woman who I hired last fall. She had a very strong theatre background. We were so excited to get her. And she lasted two days, I think. Because it was just so different from what she had thought it was. It was completely out of her realm, beyond what she was willing to attempt."[6] Kate Hill, third person interpreter at Old Sturbridge Village, says that it is a "rare person" that can make the leap from director-dependent acting to living history.[7]

Alternatively, the lack of a script may be a caveat to certain interpreters' belief that living history *is* theatre. I asked Toni Brennan, first-person costumed interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, whether she felt character interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg was theatre. "*I* do," she answered. "I think some people back away a little bit when you say it's acting and it's theatre. But you're portraying a person that's not yourself. You're wearing clothing of that person and of that time period. You're in a different setting. You're saying words that aren't really your own. You don't have a script, but in a sense, it's theatre."[8] Brennan's colleague, Bill Barker, who portrays Thomas Jefferson, was even more direct: "[N]o question about it. I don't think there's any question that putting on a costume and portraying a character is theatre. We're becoming someone other than ourselves and speaking lines that we might know they have written."[9]

A first-person interpreter playing Lydia Maria Child at Old Sturbridge Village told me that, while she had no theatre background before coming to work at Sturbridge sixteen years ago, she has since developed as a "historic ham": "When you're on a stage and performing, that is a form of theatre," she says, "And what a stage you have!"[10] When I told her that many individuals responded negatively to the same question, because of a lack of a script, she caviled. "It is in my case, because I'm in a role, and I'm talking to people and bringing them in to it. And that's what you hope that theatre will do."

Though most of the individuals who talked to me referred to a script in a very literal sense, there are also broader connotations to the term "script" or "scripted." A third-person costumed interpreter at Pioneer Village in Salem, Massachusetts, criticized first-person museums like Plimoth for being too "scripted" and not focusing as much on education as do third person sites. "It's like a Disneyworld for kids, because everything is scripted, and they can't get their questions answered unless it's referring to 1627. Here at Pioneer Village, we are able to balance education with entertainment for kids [...], unlike the type of drama they do at Plimoth Plantation."[11] In this instance, despite Plimoth interpreters' own insistence that Pilgrim role-playing differs from theatre in its lack of script, the Pioneer Village interpreter perceived Plimoth's rigidly structured programming as a "scripted" mode of performance.

As in the example above, interpreters would often draw distinctions between actor and educator when discussing whether living history was theatre. Mark Muller, who plays George Washington at Colonial Williamsburg, described first-person interpretation as a combination of both. "For me it's a mixture of theatrical and educational," Muller

explained, though he shared that many of his colleagues made a definite distinction:

> [T]here seems to be a little bit of a line drawn here for some people, [who] consider themselves historical interpreters, and, in some small way, resent the people who have theatrical or acting backgrounds. But hey! I'm playing George Washington. It's gotta be convincing, you know? One of the guys with the biggest mouth against the actors here, who wanted to play Washington here, I could never see him doing this [...].[12]

Many third-person interpreters do not regard what they do as theatre, but do consider first-person interpretation as theatre. This was a common sentiment among staff at third-person sites like Pioneer Village, [13] or at various programs at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Michigan.[14] I asked one of the third-person Native interpreters at Plimoth Plantation's Hobbamock's Homesite whether she would regard the type of interpretation conducted by the Wampanoag Interpretation Program as a form of theatre, specifically in relation to the first person interpretation in the Pilgrim Village:

> To a degree. I mean we do the same things that our ancestors would have throughout the season, and we get a different perspective on life, because of it. So, we kind of, in a way, are being brought back into that time, even though we talk from a modern day perspective, and we're talking in public, in that manner. So, [it is] in a way, but not as much as them [the Pilgrim Interpreters], where we can't get into character as much as they can. Which would be interesting, too.[15]

It is not rare to find that interpreters on the same staff and in the same interpretive positions differ widely in their regard for the theatricality of their role. The range of responses from co-workers at Williamsburg and Sturbridge bears this out. I was, therefore, not surprised to find a similar divergence in the accounts of hosts and hostesses costumed as nineteenth-century Swedish folk at Skansen in Stockholm. "Do you think this is a type of theatre?" I asked a hostess interpreting an 1860s representation of Oktorps-Gården. "No. No." She responded. "Even with the costumes and historical chores?" I pressed. "No, it isn't."[16] The very next hostess, at adjacent Ekshärads-Gården, had a very different response to the same question. "Oh yes, absolutely." She said. "We dress in nice clothes, and we try to make it as real as possible."[17] Annika Johansson, Assistant Director of the host and hostess program at Skansen, noted that individual hosts are free to temporarily assume a historic character: "[O]ur hosts working in the buildings, they're not actors [...]. They are interpreters—historical interpreters. And of course they can sometimes enter a role in a way, because, as you've seen, they are dressed up, like matching the period of the building that they are working in [...]. But it's not that they pretend or are in the role at the time. [18]

The strongest line of reasoning voiced by those opposed or hesitant to calling living interpretation theatre, as indicated above in several of the responses by both curatorial and interpretive staff members, is that interpreters are educators, rather than actors.[19] Several practitioners with whom I spoke would not call living history a kind of theatre, but allowed that living museum interpretation was a form of education that used theatrical resources to achieve educational goals. Mark Howell, Program Manager at Colonial Williamsburg, for instance, says, "I don't see it as theatre as much as an educational technique which just happens to borrow a lot of the [theatrical] technique as an educational process.[20]

From the often negative feelings some interpreters have toward the idea of theatre, whether it be a contempt for "actors" who arrive unprepared for the job, or the disapproval of performers perceived to privilege an entertainment value over an educational one, it would appear that "theatre" as a term has a acquired a particular charge as a dirty word. Diane Landon spoke to this sentiment. "I think in the field you'll find that people who feel they are true living historians do not want to be associated with theatre. That somehow theatre invalidates [...] what they're doing. And that theatre makes it play. Pretend. Not real."[21]

It would seem, in the face of these responses, that living history museums for the most part do not regard themselves as a kind of theatre, but, if anything, as institutions that borrow techniques from theatre in order to further their educational goals. The problem is that, by not embracing (or much of the time even acknowledging) an explicit role in a theatrical enterprise, museums effectively cut off the kind of proactive research and workshopping that would allow them to bring their current performative programming up to speed with the more efficacious theatrical practices of the contemporary theatre.

I have argued in my recent work that living museum's brand of "ethnohistorical" realism is more closely related to the theatre of the strict realists in nineteenth century Europe than what audiences see in the more vibrant theatre scene today.[22] Because of their adherence to arguably "old-fashioned" techniques, they face the limitations of representation that

spurred theatre practitioners to depart from strict realism less than two decades after its heyday. For instance, the interpreters' commitment to singular characters based on historic individuals or amalgams drawn from written documents or archaeological findings often limit discourse between interpreter and visitor to a small window of the past that makes it awkward to bridge that moment with the present or make connections with the larger historic milieu.[23] Despite waves of social history that swept museums in the 1970s and 1980s, narratives of those disenfranchised peoples whose histories were not regarded as fit for recording at the time will not be found in the archives where historians get their material for the founding father characters. Thus, African-American, Native American, and a bulk of the women and poor people characters are balkanized into alternative programs that do not feature first-person reenactment, but rather foreground "second-person" craft activities, song and storytelling programs, or third-person docentship and walking tours. These programs are often deemphasized in museum brochures and websites as they lack the same coinage as the flagship first-person performance programming visitors have been conditioned to expect in the past decades.

Furthermore, when institutions like Colonial Williamsburg or Plimoth Plantation stage reenactments of historic events (slave auctions, militia musters, news of the Boston Tea Party arriving in Virginia's capitol, and so forth), strict adherence to mimetic realism coupled with season themes or curatorial agendas usually limit these stagings to skit-like vignettes closely following a scripted storyline or improvised scenario intended to deliver a lesson or a set of talking points.[24] Rarely do these performance events allow a multiplicity of narratives that would open up richer pedagogical possibilities.

In my own work, I have advocated that museums look to the more recent performative practices initiated by Bertolt Brecht, which use meta-theatrical techniques and "aesthetic distancing" to provoke a more critical engagement with the performance events, or to the techniques associated with Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (based on Paolo Freire's pedagogical models), which empower the spectator to actually stop the performance and step into the action to allow more visitor agency in determining her or his access to the historical narratives otherwise limited by singular storylines.[25] In a similar vein, I have also argued that museums might actually do a better service to their constituencies by looking toward expanding upon their "second-person" programming, using techniques from contemporary theatre to encourage visitors to try on the roles of the more famous protagonists of history, giving them actual recorded historical scenarios in which they are faced with a problem and asked to respond.[26] Facilitators would then guide discussion toward whether these choices matched or deviated from the actual event, and toward the ways in which the historical conditions that allowed those choices differed from those of today. Indeed, examples of the above can already be found at both living and non-living museums. Conner Prairie in Indiana offers evening programs reenacting historic court cases in which visitors are invited to issue a verdict based on the evidence that would have been available to the past juries. The Constitution Center in Philadelphia similarly allows visitors to sit on a simulated Supreme Court bench to hear famous or contentious cases and try their hand at making a decision.

Like it or not, costumed staff at living museums are "edutainers" first and foremost.[27] Museum visitors are drawn to these historic areas for many reasons: a love of history, an interest in historic architecture or gardening, a desire on the part of parents to expose their children to something educational on their way to Busch Gardens or the beach. But living museum administrators have long known that the performance element serves as their biggest draw (by the late 1970s, living history programs were attracting more visitors to open-air museums in than were artifacts.[28]). Rather than treating theatre as an embarrassment or a dirty word, then, museum staff ought to take up the charge to theatre since the time of Horace, who wrote that the aim of theatre should be to "both delight and instruct." By more fully recognizing and celebrating the pedagogical power and potential of this dual role of theatre, museums can push their current programs or create new ones that offer greater efficacy in bearing witness to the lived past.

This paper was originally presented at "Historians in Public," Indiana Association of Historians February 2007 Conference, Indiana University.

Scott Magelssen received his Ph.D. in Theatre History, Theory, and Dramatic Literature from the University of Minnesota . He formerly taught Introduction to Theatre, the Theatre History sequence, Dramaturgy, and Performance Studies at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Scott will be joining the faculty at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, in August.

Notes:

1. See Stephen Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 1993); See also Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984); and James Deetz and Patricia Scott Deetz, *The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony* (New York:

Freeman, 2000)

2. Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg.* (Durham: Duke U P, 1999) 70.
3. Handler and Gable 75, quoting from "Visitor's Companion" 10-16 [December 1990] 8.
4. Diane Landon, personal interview, 7 June 2000.
5. Barney Barnes, personal interview, 8 June 2000.
6. Cynthia Gedraitis, personal interview, 15 June 2000.
7. Kate Hill, personal interview, 19 June 2000.
8. Toni Brennan, personal interview, 7 June 2000.
9. Bill Barker, personal interview, 7 June 2000.
10. First person, costumed interpreter, personal interview 19 June 2000.
11. Third-person costumed interpreter at Pioneer Village, personal interview, 16 June 2000.
12. Mark Muller, personal interview, 5 June 2000.
13. Third person costumed interpreter, personal interview, 16 June 2000.
14. Third person interpreter, Firestone Farm program, Greenfield Village, 2 July 2003.
15. Third person costumed interpreter at Hobbamock's Homesite, personal interview, 17 June 2000
16. Costumed hostess at Oktorps-Gården, Skansen, personal interview, 8 July 2002.
17. Costumed hostess at Ekshärads-Gården, Skansen, personal interview, 8 July 2002.
18. Annika Johansson, personal interview, 8 July 2002.
19. In a promotional video, role-player Kathleen Rawlins discusses what she feels is the role of the interpreter at Plimoth Plantation (again finding it necessary to mention the absence of a script): "I think an interpreter is an educator. In some ways you're an actor. But you are an actor who's been put into an enormous set without a script [...]. But I think much more than an actor it's an educator." (*Plimoth Plantation*, video, Video Tours, Inc., 1989).
20. Mark Howell, personal interview 7 June 2000.
21. Diane Landon, personal interview, 7 June 2000.
22. See my article, "Living History Museums and the Construction of the Real through Performance," *Theatre Survey* 45.1 (May 2004).
23. See Bruce McConachie, "Slavery and Authenticity: Performing a Slave Auction at Colonial Williamsburg," *Theatre Annual* vol 51 (1998) 71-72; and Suzan-Lori Parks, "Possession," *The America Play And Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995) 4-5.
24. Colonial Williamsburg's season theme this past summer, "Revolutionary City," promised in its ad campaign to be the most interactive program to date. My visit there, however, revealed that they were still relying heavily on the same skits and pageantry as in past seasons.
25. See Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Scarecrow, 2007).
26. See my articles, "'This is a Drama. You are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's "Follow the North Star," *Theatre Topics* (Spring 2006); and "Making History in the "Second-Person": Post-Touristic Considerations for Living Historical Interpretation," *Theatre Journal* (Spring 2006).
27. Thanks to Cathy Stanton for suggesting this very appropriate term for my title.
28. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1985) 298.

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with Boning Variations from Chester County Historical Museum and Conner Prairie Museum

Funnel-Shaped Silhouette.
Court Dress of the Reign of Louis XVI, circa 1776, from *Freaks of Fashion,* 1867.

The term "transition stays" has been used for many years and refers to the stays worn from about 1795 to 1810, a period when the long, fully boned, funnel-shaped, back-lacing stays of the eighteenth century were giving way to shorter versions that generally opened in front. These transition stays often had fewer bones and sometimes included cups to support the breasts.

Clothing historian and museum consultant, Nancy Rexford, suggests that transition stays were front opening because it was important for the backs of gowns to be smooth. A stay laced in the back would show under the delicate, often thin fabrics so popular at the turn of the nineteenth century.

After the 1795-1810 transitional period, a new form of stay gradually appeared, beginning about 1810, having shoulder straps, gores for the bust and bones only along the laced back fastening. The center front had a pocket for a busk, commonly a narrow piece of wood, while the rest of the garment was stiffened with cording. These new corded stays became the norm from about 1820 to 1850. In the 1810s, before the new style was fully established, some women wore simple linen or cotton bust supports with no boning. These supports were made with a separate breast piece that was gathered to fit above and below the breasts: one piece if back opening, two if front opening. If the garment extended below the waist, it was cut with a front and back that were shaped to fit over the hips.

Extant stays from the period 1795-1810 are relatively rare, but I have located and studied the following examples of one particular style of transition stays:

· DHS Danvers Historical Society, Danvers, MA #82.59 (the model for this pattern)

· CC Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA #700

· CHS Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CN #X-1983-65-1

· CP Conner Prairie, Indianapolis, IN #96.5

· DAR Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, Washington, D.C. #82.138.4

· URI University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI #52.63.39

· WR Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH #55.517.

Short Version Silhouette.
Lady of Fashion, 1806, from *Freaks of Fashion,*

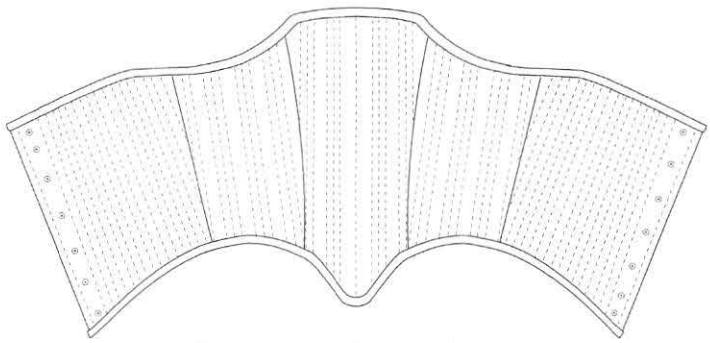

Illustration of Stays from the Danvers Historical Society, #82.59

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1. The first style opens in front but has shoulder straps and generally extends below the waist with tabs. The boning is sewn on the diagonal on the fronts (similar to the CP exception) rather than on the traight as in the examples above. The fabric of those not recut from earlier stays is almost always cotton. The horizontal breast casings are part of the original construction and have not been added as they were in the stays described above. These stays pull the shoulders back and create a different posture from the transition stays described above. Examples of this alternative include:

· Farmers' Museum, New York State Historical Association, #NS91.67
· Historic New England, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities #1938.350
· Kansas City Museum, #67.33.5
· Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. #116.114
· Philadelphia Museum of Art #1998.162-50.

2. The second style has all of the above features plus unboned, adjustable, fabric bust cups. Examples of this alternative include:

· Connecticut Historical Society #1963-42-4
· Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y. #C1 41.94
· The Hermitage, Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J. #1983.001.001.

A last curiosity: instead of eyelets through which a lace is threaded to fasten the front, there are two stays that have short tapes that tie in front (Kansas City Museum #67.33.5 and University of Rhode Island #52.63.39). The stays in the Kansas City Museum collection were widened with pieces sewn to the front edges. There is no boning at the pieced front edges. The stays at the University of Rhode Island appear to have been made without eyelets and appear to have been made without boning at the front edge.

Proving to a certainty what was worn under a gown is extremely difficult because it is rare in America to find late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century documented, fashionable, boned stays and gowns that were worn together. To solve the mystery of which shape of stays was worn under which style of gown, it is to necessary

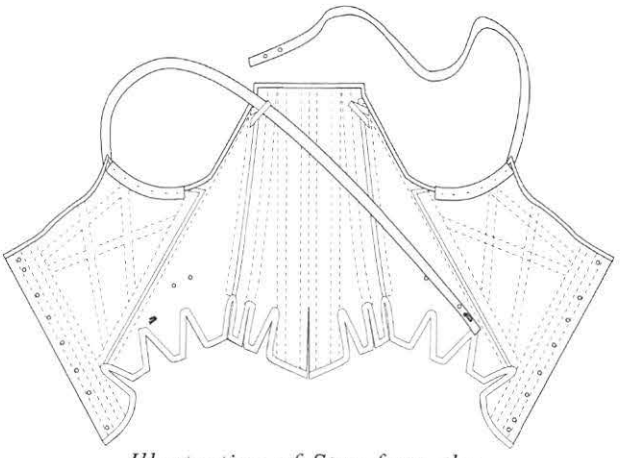

Illustration of Stay from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, #1998.162-50

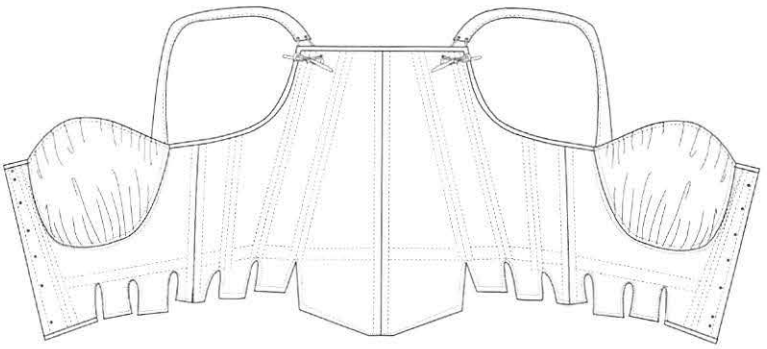

Illustration of Stay from the Connecticut Historical Society, #1963-42-4

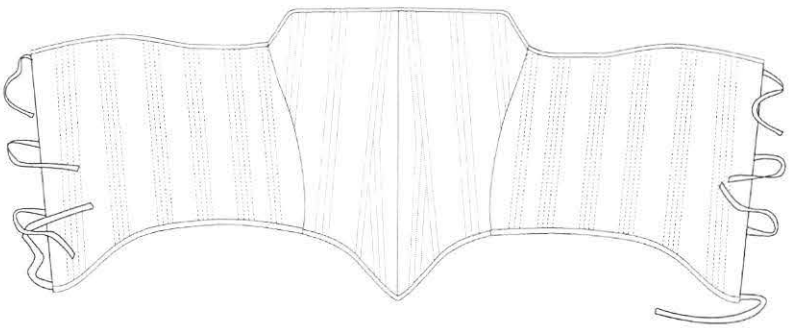

Illustration of Stay from the University of Rhode Island, #52.63.39

study the art of the period.
The following excerpts from an article by Nancy Rexford document costumes that were worn in both urban and rural areas of New England, and provide valuable clues to the shape of the stays worn under the sitters' gowns.

Can costume be used to date portraits?

It would be risky business indeed to try to date paintings from the sitter's clothing if there were no reliable external yardstick by which changes in fashion could be described and dated. But from the late 18th century, French, English

and German ladies' magazines regularly began to include plentiful fashion plates, all striving to be as up-to-date as possible, and as a result, we have many dated images of women's clothing for every year—indeed, every month—of the entire 19th century. These provide us with a clear understanding of the sequence of women's fashions, and provide the basic "yardstick" to which the clothing in portraits can be compared.

Fashion plates can firmly establish the earliest possible date for a painting—it cannot have been painted before the dress shown came into fashion. And it may be possible to establish a plausible end date as well, since a particular combination of cut and ornamentation is likely to appear in fashion plates only for a year or two. For this reason, the more elaborate a dress is, the more precisely it can be dated, while the simpler a dress is, the more difficult it is to date. But even when fashion plates can pin down the time at which a dress was at the height of fashion, it cannot reveal how long any particular person may actually have worn it.

For a more complex understanding of clothing we have to go to other sources, including contemporary accounts and the surviving dresses themselves. They confirm that wealthy American women did wear clothing very much like that shown in fashion plates. Less affluent women wore simpler gowns, but the vast majority even of these show the essential characteristics of the prevailing fashion in terms of cut, fabric, and the placement and style of decoration. The only time at which European fashion plates fail to be a reliable guide to American dress is during the years 1807-1815, when the blockades of the Napoleonic wars interfered with normal commerce. Through at least 1811, American continued to wear the styles which had been current in France in 1806/7.

It is often assumed that American women were as much as ten years behind Paris fashions, and that one should allow for this in dating painting of dresses. This is not true. A small but significant proportion of dresses surviving has come down with a known date, and these show that American dresses were rarely more than a year behind French styles. This delay was the result not of conservative taste but slow and irregular transportation. Wealthy ladies in coastal centers of fashion like New York and Philadelphia bought new French fashions as quickly as the ships could bring them.

Even in frugal New England . . . , women kept an eye on fashion. The tradition that women made one "best silk" last year after year may have some truth to it, but a study of those carefully preserved dresses shows that they were altered over and over again to keep them in fashion. And when no amount of fixing would do, they were carefully taken apart, cleaned, turned and remade in the new style, sometimes incorporating new fabric with the old. Resources may have been limited but the evidence is eloquent that women were not indifferent to fashion.

Even in a culture as fashion-conscious as early 19th century America seems to have been, however, some women had occasion to be conservative in their dress. For example, the change from tight natural-waisted dresses to softly gathered high-waisted ones in the mid-1790s was too dramatic to be comfortably adopted by some older women. This discrepancy between young and old is illustrated in the c. 1802 group portrait of four generations of women in the Ege-Galt family (Abby Aldrick Rockefeller Folk Art Center, #201 in AARFAC portrait catalog). The baby and young mother are in white, high-waisted dresses, while the grandmother and great-grandmother are still wearing the tight fitting dark gown of the early 1790s.

It is not only the older women who had trouble accepting the immodesty of the new style. As late as 1806, Mrs. Cephas Smith (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) was painted wearing a dress which is far more typical of the late 1790s. Another very similar dress, worn by a bride in 1805, survives in Northampton, Mass. As one might expect these conservative examples are more likely to appear in the work of itinerant folk artists who served the smaller towns than in the painting of academic artists like Gilbert Stuart whose clientele was urban, wealthy and sophisticated.

In her article Rexford includes drawings to illustrate at which dates the differing gown styles appear in American paintings between 1800 and 1845. For the purposes of this discussion, Figures 1, 2 and 3, dating 1795-1808, have been chosen for comparison of the shapes of the bodices of front-opening gowns. The bodice shapes of Figures 1 and 2 would work well with the #030 Transition Stays. Compare Figures 1 and 2 with Figure 3. The bodice drawn in Figure 3 has a wide and low neckline. The rounded bustline with the pinched-in high waist would require the alternative stays made with adjustable fabric cups and shoulder straps.

Rexford's article continues:

> The dates indicate when each style is likely to appear in [American] portraits, not necessarily when they appear in European fashion plates. The figures are roughly uniform to draw attention to difference in waist level, neck and skirt fullness. The shoulder line reflects contemporary artistic practice. Most

of the necklines shown would have been filled in with fichus, ruffs, collars or lace.
For the sake of clarity, those accessories are not shown . . .

The new short-waisted style was well established in England by 1794, but it took some years to be adopted by all American women. Skirts were always quite full in the 1790s but from 1800 they became gradually skimpier. Necklines were V-necked or round, the latter dominating after 1800, when they were often low and wide. Many were on drawstrings, resulting in gathered effects over the bust. In the 1790s sleeves were tight to the arm and ended either at the wrist or elbow. After 1800 sleeves shown in portraits usually ended above the elbow. They are rarely full, but are often tied up in a kind of swag (fig. 3). Note how the line of the armhole tends to slant inward toward the neck, creating the effect of a narrow shoulder.

Skirts completely flat in front were the rule from 1809 but sophisticated urban women wore them several years earlier. Between 1807 and 1810, rounded necklines gave way to low, wide, necklines with the square corners of figure 3 . . . .

Figure 1: c. 1795-1805

Figure 2: c. 1795-1806

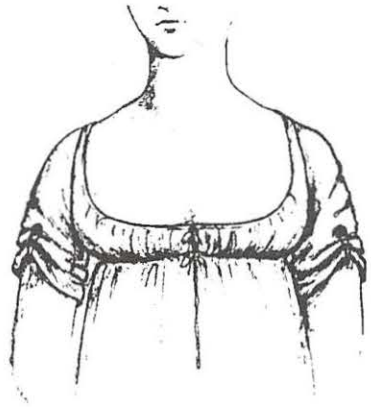

Figure 3: c. 1800-1808

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Saundra Ros Altman is the proprietress of Past Patterns, an historical pattern company

25th Anniversary Endowment Fund

Candace Matelic, founder of MOMCC, has pledged the first donation to the MOMCC endowment - $2,500, which she challenges MOMCC members to match 3 to 1. By the campaign's end the fund will increase to at least $10,000. Pledges already stand at $3,097. MOMCC established the endowment to honor the organization's 25th anniversary. The interest from the $10,000 investment will increase MOMCC services to members, including but not limited to fellowships to attend MOMCC and ALHFAM conferences, invited speakers at conferences, and special publications.

Contributions of any amount are welcome, and all funds will be restricted. Please use the endowment as an opportunity for planned as well as memorial giving. Contributions may be made in installments, with billing occurring twice during FY 2004-2005 (Sept. 1-Aug. 31) and twice during FY 2005-2006.

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James Hall: A Figure in American Literature and Western History

by
Patricia Kennedy

In the realm of Social and Cultural history, there are people and/or events that personify greater social trends of specific eras. James Hall, a lawyer, judge, banker, and author, is one of these people. As a transplanted easterner, he came to Illinois in 1820. A self-proclaimed romantic at heart, he was intrigued by the stories of adventure on the wild frontier and became, in due time, its spokesperson. When he arrived in Shawneetown, Illinois, at the age of twenty-six, he found a culture distinct from the eastern culture he had left behind. Whereas in the east things were established and controlled, the west was new, vibrant, and rough.

The time in which James Hall lived, 1793-1868, was the beginning of a new era in American history. With the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, a new generation was establishing its independence and identity. The west was open for settlement, and many people were trying to define themselves in this changing environment. "The passage of social responsibility from parent to children is always a fascinating interplay of the inherited and the novel,"[1] says Joyce Appleby,

> The destruction of much of their elders' world forced the members of this generation to move forward on their own, a necessity that set them apart from earlier and later cohorts. Neither their parents' example nor their communities' tested formulas could guide them in the new situations they encountered...their mothers and fathers were immured in the past, stuck there at the very time that the pace of change exaggerated the difference between past and present.[2]

Appleby describes the generation that proceeded America's Revolution as one without a past. It was up to them to create their identity as well as an American identity. "Many of the new generation became agents of change in an era of change marked by the convergence of political revolutions, commercial expansion, and intellectual ferment that penetrated...the most mundane aspects of life."[3] James Hall was one of these agents of change.

Growing up instilled with the virtues of the Revolutionary War and trying to create his own identity from those virtues, Hall contributed to and helped establish what his generation felt was the meaning of being an American. He believed that the western culture and settlement held the true meaning of what America was and should be about. He made it his goal to disseminate and preserve this rich history and establish a continental identity for the people now living in the new states of the western frontier, such as Illinois. He did this by editing newspapers, creating the first literary magazine in Illinois, establishing the first historical society in Illinois, writing about the history of the people who settled the area, and speaking out on hot topics of the day such as education and religion. According to historian Terry Barnhart, "The first settlers of the region had stories to be told – those who 'encountered all the perils and hardships incident to frontier settlements; the daring achievements and wonderful privations of those who voluntarily forsook the comforts and the safety of society, to abide in the savage wilderness.'"[4] In telling these first settlers' stories, however, Hall also told *his* stories and became just as much of a participant in Western history and culture as he was an advocate of it.

James Hall was born in Philadelphia in 1793 to a prominent upper-class family. His father was a Revolutionary soldier, secretary of the land office, United States marshal for Pennsylvania, and a member of a well-known family of Maryland planters. His mother instilled his love of literature. She came from an intellectual family and enjoyed writing and reading immensely. Her father was a graduate of Princeton

and the favorite student of the college president, Aaron Burr. Hall said his mother "was surrounded by the light of knowledge..."[5] During her married years, she wrote often and contributed some of her writings to her sons' publication, the *Port Folio*. Even with a family and household to take care of, she was known to stay up late into the night studying and writing.[6] She encouraged all her children to pursue their literary talents.

James Hall studied law as well as serving in the Washington Guards during the War of 1812. Opening his own law office in Pittsburgh just two months after his admission to the bar in 1818, he began his involvement with the local paper, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. From his first article would stem countless more, sparking romantic and adventurous notions, including his departure for Shawneetown, Illinois in 1820. Later, when asked about why he left to go to frontier Illinois, Hall writes, "Having no dependence but my own exertions...with great ardor and hopefulness of spirit, and energy of purpose, I resolved to go to a new country to practice my profession where I could rise with the growth of the population – but [I was] allured in fact by a romantic disposition, a thirst for adventure, and a desire to see the rough scenes of the frontier."[7]

Illinois became a state in 1818, but the land act of 1820 helped to populate it. Many new settlers came to the newly-formed state at the same time James Hall was inspired to explore the western frontier. Many of these new settlers were from the Upland Southern states of Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia but some, like Hall, were transplants from the eastern states. Their first settlements were around fertile and wooded areas such as the land around the Wabash, the Ohio, and the Mississippi rivers.

> Whatever their motivations for migrating, Americans and foreigners chose Illinois. Fertile land enticed them to Illinois through the 1850s, but so did opportunities in retail stores, mills, pulpits, schools, and elective and appointed offices. Illinois offered other attractions: relative tranquility, improving markets, little destructive speculation, receding slavery, declining and departing Indians, virtual absence of taxes, and very low thresholds for most occupations. No other free state was closer to the Deep South or had such fine transportation to it, and yet Illinois constantly strengthened ties with the east. For those weighing options, Illinois' attractions were strong.[8]

In many ways Shawneetown was the "front door" to the emigration that came west to Illinois. Hall picked his residence of seven years well when he settled and set up shop in Illinois' financial hub for the time period. Two banks were located in Shawneetown by 1818; by 1820 two major roads connected the town to St. Louis, Missouri and to Kaskaskia, Illinois. Shawneetown also boasted an early land office, which transacted about thirty-five percent of the public acreage sold in Illinois in 1820.[9]

The town boomed in the early 1800s and had many things to offer. It was a port for transshipped salt from salt mines on Saline Creek, and, due to the jewelry stores, was an attraction for people seeking luxury goods. However, Shawneetown never became as industrialized as some of the more famous towns in Illinois. After the advent of better traveling systems such as steamboats and railroads, Shawneetown stopped its tenuous growth.[10]

Shawneetown was, however, the perfect place for Hall's first encounters with the new western culture. In Shawneetown, Hall found his "rough scenes of the frontier" that he so desired to see with the frequent loitering crewmen from the flatboats and keelboats docking in Shawneetown's harbors.

Things were not all rough-and-tumble, however. Many of the residents of Shawneetown were refined and genteel. Hall noted that as well. The general store sold books on spelling, arithmetic, reading, and even chemistry. Many people around town were educated or wished to be educated.

While Hall's legal side dealt with the ruffians of this frontier, his intellectual and literary side connected with the permanent residents of Shawneetown. At age twenty-six, he set up a law office in the town and went into business with resident Henry Eddy as editor and co-owner of the *Illinois Gazette*. He used his law practice and his newspaper to create a progressive voice in Shawneetown.

Hall soon adopted this new culture as his own. Even in his early career with the newspaper in Shawneetown, one of Hall's favorite subjects was the development of the west. He often wrote on subjects such as encouragement of emigration, poverty problems from money going back east and not staying in the region, better mail service to the western frontier, and improvements in western farming. However, the most important subject James Hall devoted his writings to was nurturing "the tender shoots of Western culture."[11]

In order for such nurturing to take place, Hall made space in the *Illinois Gazette* to review, inform, and give general accounts of different literary works that were new in the area

and captured the emerging western culture. Examples of these accounts are numerous. William Gibbs Hunt's newly formed literary review magazines, the *Western Review,* first published August 26, 1820, and the *Masonic Miscellany and Ladies Literary Magazine*, which made its appearance in the western states in July 1821, were reviewed in the *Illinois Gazette*. Benjamin Drake's article "Anniversary Discourse of the State and Prospects of the Western Museum Society" was also given space in the newspaper.[12]

Powerful acquaintances and judicial responsibilities of his own only added to Hall's understanding and love for emerging western culture and "added greatly to his store of anecdotes about the character of Westerners – anecdotes upon which he would draw in several of his works…Those experiences began a life-long infatuation with western geography, history, legends, and the manners and customs of Westerners. Hall had found his regional voice."[13]

During his time in Shawneetown, Hall experimented with his writing style and wrote many works on his western experiences. Some pieces ended up in the *Illinois Gazette*, while others ended up in his brothers' magazine back in Philadelphia. One set of twenty-two letters written by Hall was published in London in 1828. These *Letters from the West* were "a collection of sketches and anecdotes that document his experiences as an emigrant on the Ohio and a resident of Shawneetown."[14]

In 1827, Hall moved his family to Vandalia, which was then the Illinois state capitol. The capitol would yield many new experiences for Hall and allow him to cultivate his growing appreciation for western culture and the continued publication of that culture through the newspapers and magazines of the time. In Vandalia, he became editor and co-proprietor of the *Illinois Intelligencer*. It was also in Vandalia that Hall would found Illinois' first historical society, and it was in Vandalia that he would create the first literary magazine in Illinois.

Founded in 1819, Vandalia was still a new city in Illinois when Hall moved there in 1827. However, the aspirations the people of Vandalia had for their city were, in fact, so great that it caused them to believe in their city as more than just the capital of Illinois. Even in its beginnings, advertisements for the town boasted that it had a commanding view situated in a high and dry section of the Illinois prairie. The *Illinois Intelligencer* in 1819 wrote of its "several springs of excellent water" and how "no part of the state is better timbered." It continues, saying that "the country for many miles around is beautiful, delightfully watered and timbered, interspersed with some excellent prairies; the river is navigable for many miles above, and passes through an extensive tract of the finest lands in the state."[15] Vandalia had high hopes of becoming one of the most important cities in Illinois.

Hall hoped to make the capital the cultural center of the state as well. To prove this point, in 1827 he and a group of lawyers, politicians, and jurists gathered at the statehouse in Vandalia to form The Antiquarian and Historical Society of Illinois.

The society had many goals it wished to achieve, and each man brought a different idea of preservation. No man was more influential in shaping the society than James Hall. Hall wanted the society to be a place where the group could come together on neutral ground. "I view the concerns of literature as of paramount importance, and regard those who are engaged in the dissemination of elegant or useful learning, as deserving the highest honors, and the warmest gratitude."[16] Many of the twenty-five founders were of political backgrounds, and Hall never wished for the society to be a place where they would come and fight about their own political agendas, but rather a place where the members could "concern themselves solely with 'rendering service and honor to our common country, by fostering its infant literature, and developing its history, character, and resources.'"[17]

Some of the other important men that made up this short-lived historical society were William Wilson, chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, and Edward Coles, former governor of Illinois, who both became the vice presidents of the society; James Whitlock, who became secretary; and Robert H. Peebles, who was appointed librarian. A promotional committee of correspondence consisted of John M. Robinson, John Reynolds, Sydney Breese, George Forquer, and Benjamin Mills.[18]

The president of the Antiquarian and Historical Society of Illinois was, of course, James Hall, and in his address to the members of the society he outlined the purpose of the society by developing "themes that defined his regional creed as an Illinoisan."[19] These themes consisted of the study of regional history and the promotion its literature.

While the society was short lived, meeting only formally from 1827 to 1829, it did solidify the beliefs and themes that would be seen repeatedly in Hall's writings and magazines. The one true problem that faced the society and ultimately caused its downfall was time. None of the members had enough time to devote themselves to the awesome responsibilities that went into starting and maintaining the society. Edward Coles and John Reynolds both apologized and explained that they were too busy with other affairs to be "conducting antiquarian and historical investigations."[20]

Hall was no different from the rest of the men who made up the historical society. He found himself increasingly busy with his own responsibilities. In 1828, an overwhelming majority reelected him State Treasurer, and in the years following, he began devoting more of his time to writing. He wished to create something more for western society by proving its worth to the rest of the country and contributing to its growing literature. By 1830 he had started the first monthly literary magazine in Illinois, the *Illinois Monthly Magazine*.

Starting magazines, reviews, and newspapers during the early 1800s was extremely hard work and, while it was attempted often enough, it was still a problem getting enough money together to start and maintain such endeavors. The financial backing required to start and maintain a newspaper, magazine, or review was among the most difficult to obtain. The only thing more difficult was reaping any revenue or profit from the newspaper once an owner had secured financial backing. "Almost without exception," writes Ralph Leslie Rusk, "the papers whose beginnings have been chronicled were founded with either the assurance or the hope of securing government patronage; and their first concern was therefore to publish the laws, the printing of which was their most dependable source of revenue. But, even with this more or less certain means of support (for many rivals were soon in the field), their existence was at best a precarious one until later in the pioneer period."[21]

Hall's troubles were more than just money, however. His also had high aspirations for his review, as he wanted it to be "devoted chiefly to criticisms on new books, descriptions of scenery, statistics of Illinois, essays on rural economy, scientific papers, periodical essays, biography, tales, literary intelligence, fugitive poetry," as well as, "notices of the fine and useful arts."[22]

The ambitions Hall had for his literary review hearkened back to what he wished the Antiquarian and Historical Society of Illinois had done. He tried to focus his review to include the truth about Illinois and its history. He tried to become the voice of the western frontier. The article "On Western Character" epitomizes this idea. Appearing in February of 1833, this article is a reaction to the misconceptions Easterners had of western culture.

Many believed that western society, as a whole, was less literate than eastern society. This article said that this misconception may be true in some cases but not in all or even most. "When those who advocate education, religion, or benevolence, think it necessary in the warmth of their zeal, to describe our people as more ignorant and demoralized than those of other parts of the Union, we not only cannot go with them, but must be permitted to enter our protest, and to retort the charge of *ignorance*, upon those who make it."[23] Illiteracy has nothing to do with a person's intelligence, as the article points out, and "A human being may know how to read, and yet be a very stupid fellow."[24]

"Schools are not so abundant in the western as in the eastern states," the article reads, "and of course the great mass of the people are not so well educated; but it does not follow, that they are less intelligent. Information may be gained in different ways; those most prominent, are, by reading, and by observation."[25]

Unfortunately, as Rusk says in his book entitled *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*, "The West, in fact, was not ready for a literary review."[26] For the two years the review was based in Vandalia, Hall contributed about two-thirds of the writing. The problem in getting writers and subscribers for the magazine was a formidable one, and Hall finally solved it by moving the magazine from the small capital city of Illinois to the bustling publication capital of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sadly, with the moving of the review also came the end of the historical society for good. While the group had not met formally for some time, people still had hopes that it would continue. Edward P. Alexander observed, "...the enthusiastic little judge with his busy pen had understood how to run a historical society,"[27] and when James Hall left Vandalia, so went the society.

When starting up his review again in Cincinnati, Hall changed its name to the *Western Monthly Magazine*, "a continuation of the *Illinois Monthly Magazine*." This magazine, while under Hall's care, contained much of the same themes featured in its predecessor. There were articles on history, fiction, reviews, science, and new inventions, and large sections devoted to education and free public schools.

James Hall was a product of his generation. Like many of his time, he was caught up in the mysticism of the western frontier and looked to make a name and define himself in the new settlements of that frontier. He was passionate about the land he had adopted as his own, wishing to quantify and clarify what American culture was and what the emerging western culture meant in America as a whole. He took great pains to start the literary world of the western culture, believing in it as one of the truest forms of American Literature. He fought for western relevance in a time when most believed the eastern states and their affairs were all that mattered.

While one must remember that James Hall held romantic notions and at times had a wiggish approach to historic preservation, he nonetheless helped give the western frontier its voice and bring its culture into the overall culture of America. He put western culture on par with the historic past of the eastern half of the United States, and made western culture a continuation of that history. "I have written to and for my country. My subjects are all American, and they are treated in an independent American Spirit. If there is an American Literature, I hope to have a place, however humble, in it. If there is no [American] Literature, I am nobody."[28]

Patricia Kennedy holds a bachelor's degree. in History and Spanish from North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, and a master's degree in Historical Administration from Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. She has worked at Naper Settlement in Naperville, Illinois and Volkening Heritage Farm in Schaumberg, Illinois and currently holds the position of assistant site manager at Garfield Farm Museum in La Fox, Illinois.

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Notes

1 Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution; The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2000), p. 2-3.
2 . Ibid.
3 . Ibid.
4 . Terry A. Barnhart. "Elegant and Useful Learning: the Antiquarian and Historical Society of Illinois, 1827-1829." Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society. Vol. 95, No. 1. (Spring 2002), p. 13.
5 . Randolph C. Randall, *James Hall, Spokesman of the New West* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 8.
6 . Ibid. p. 10.
7 . Ibid. p. 79.
8 . James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p.83.
9 . Ibid. p. 173.
10 . Ibid. p. 173-177.
11 . Ibid. p. 98.
12 . Ibid
13 . Barnhart. "Elegant and Useful Learning" Op Cit., p. 8.
14 . Ibid. p. 9.
15 . Davis, Op Cit., p. 174.
16 . Ibid. p.10.
17 . Ibid.
18 . Ibid.
19 . Ibid.
20 . Barnhart. "Elegant and Useful Learning" Op Cit. p. 25.
21 . Ralph Leslie Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p.145.
22 . Ibid. p. 171.
23 . James Hall "On Western Character." The Western Monthly Magazine. (Vol. 1, January to June, 1833), p. 50.
24 . Ibid. p. 51.
25 . Ibid.
26 . Rusk, Op Cit., p. 170.
27 . Barnhart. "Elegant and Useful Learning" Op Cit., p. 28.
28 . Terry A. Barnhart. "A Common Feeling: Regional Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Old Northwest, 1820-1860,"

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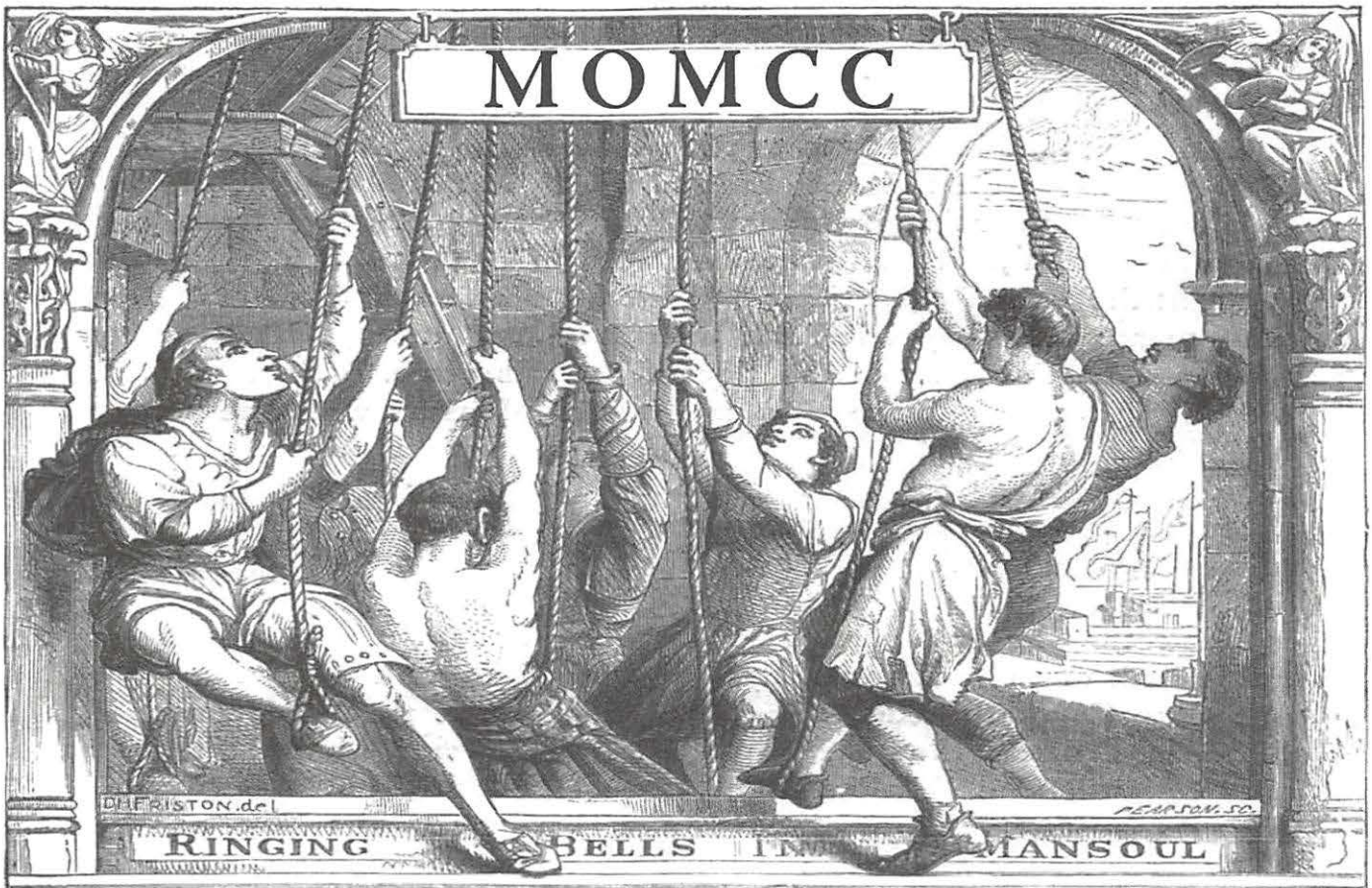

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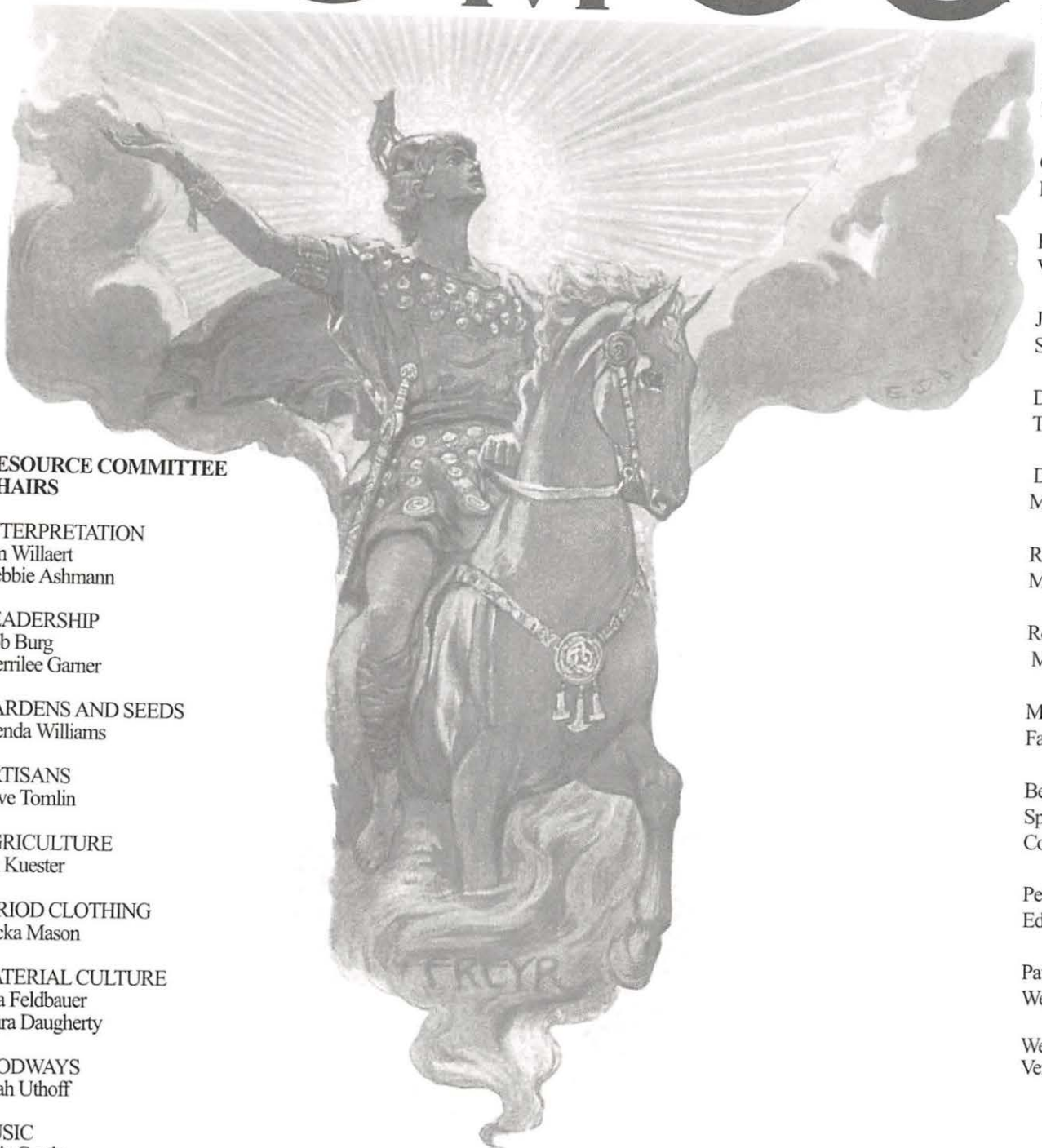

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